AUGUST 2021

A Times of India publication

FEMINA

Be unstoppable

GAMECHANGERS OF TOMORROW

The Economic Times presents
LEADING WOMEN IN BUSINESS
BrandEdge
FEMINA

VISIT…

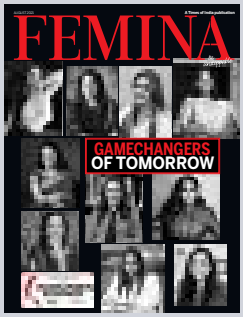
Foreword

Being a leader is not something to be taken lightly, especially for the women in this country. With great power comes great responsibility, and true leaders are those who use that power successfully, for the greater good. It's a trait we see, in common, with the women in this book. These women are gamechangers who have paved their own way to success, ensuring that their brands or companies flourish under their aegis. It takes hard work, creativity, determination and grit; something the women in this curated list have in droves. We celebrate these gamechangers of tomorrow and their abilities to convert ideas into reality.

With great power comes great responsibility, and true leaders are those who use that power successfully, for the greater good

A.M

AMBIKA MUTTOO
@MissMuttoo
@missmuttoo



DESIGN
BHUSHAN TONDWALKAR

Chief Executive Officer
Deepak Lamba
Editor
Ambika Muttoo
Managing Editor
Primrose Monteiro-D'Souza
Deputy Editor
Shraddha Kamdar
Chief Copy Editor
Chennai Kayalvizhi Arivalan
Features Editor
Pune Radhika Sathe-Patwardhan
Junior Features Editor
Ahmedabad Kalwyna Rathod
Design Director
Bendi Vishan
Assistant Art Director
Bhushan Tondwalkar

Assistant Vice President, Digital Revenue & Marketing
Priyadarshi Banerjee
Brand Manager
Chandni Chopra
Chief Financial Officer
S Subramaniam
Head Human Resources
Meghna Puthawala
Publisher
Sunil Wuthoo
Vice President-Content Studio
Vidyut Patra

BRAND SOLUTIONS
Sales Head Sunita Quadros,
sunita.quadros@timesgroup.com
WEST
Vice President & Business Head-Femina Salon & Spa
Gautam Chopra, gautam.chopra@wwm.co.in
Associate Vice President
Reena C Dave, reena.dave@wwm.co.in
Sriram Krishnan, sriram.krishnan@wwm.co.in
Leena Bhandari, leena.bhandari@wwm.co.in
Pune Aditi Shrivastava, aditi.shrivastava@wwm.co.in
NORTH
Vice President
Anjali Rathor, anjali.rathor@wwm.co.in
Sachin Saxena, sachin.saxena@wwm.co.in.
SOUTH
Vice President & Business Head-Femina Tamil
Pravin Menon, pravin.menon@wwm.co.in
Chennai ON Rajesh, on.rajesh@wwm.co.in
Bangalore Sen Thomas, sen.thomas@wwm.co.in
EAST
Assistant Vice President Alka Kakar, Alka.kakar@wwm.co.in

WORLDWIDE MEDIA SUBSCRIPTIONS
Manager Marketing
Asha Kulkarni, asha.kulkarni@wwm.co.in
Senior Manager Subscription
Sakshi Kate, sakshi.kate@wwm.co.in
TO SUBSCRIBE:
Online: http://mags.timesgroup.com
Email: subscriptions.wwm@wwm.co.in

Femina takes no responsibility for unsolicited photographs or material ALL PHOTOGRAPHS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED, ARE USED FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY Printed and published by Sunil Wuthoo for and on behalf of owners Worldwide Media Pvt Ltd, The Times of India Building, Dr DN Road, Fort, Mumbai 400 001 and published at Worldwide Media Pvt Ltd, The Times of India Building, Dr DN Road, Fort, Mumbai 400 001. All rights reserved worldwide. Reproducing in any manner without prior written permission prohibited.

FEMINA

CONTENTS

ON THE COVER

Seema Singh
Dr Swati Piramal
Suchita Oswal Jain
Hemlata M Sanghvi
Malobika Banerjee MJ
Radhika Seksaria
Aditi Gupta
Dr Mariazeena Johnson
Trupti Agarwal
Dr Leena S

05 **ADITI GARWARE,** Cake Artist & Baker

06 **ADITI GUPTA,** Author & Co-Founder, Menstrupedia

08 **ARCHANA KHOSLA BURMAN** Founder Partner, Vertices Partners

10 **AISHWARYA REDDY,** Founder, Khensu

11 **FARHA SYED,** Fashion Designer

12 **ANKITI BOSE,** CEO, Zilingo

14 **ASRA SYED,** Fashion Designer

16 **BENU SEHGAL,** CEO, Freeport Retail India

18 **HEMLATA MUKESH SANGHVI,** Joint MD & Chief Promoter of Vardhman Jewellers, Vardhman Co-op Credit Society, and Owner of Vardhman Films

19 **INDU SHRIVASTAVA,** Co-Founder, INDU

20 **KANIKA GUPTA SHORI,** Founder & COO, Square Yards

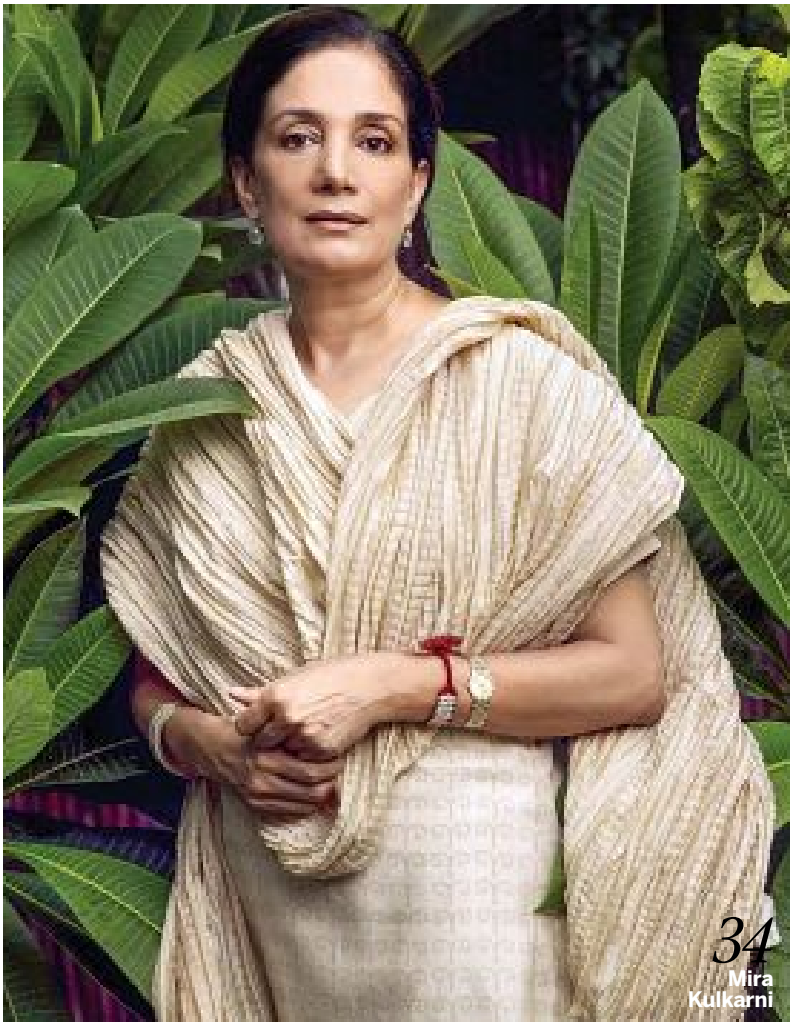
22 **KHUSHBOO JAIN,** Co-Founder and COO, ImpactGuru.com

23 **MILI SAVEKAR,** Creative Head, Interiors by Mili

24 **KHUSHNUM AVARI,** Founder, Panache Academy

26 **DR LEENA S,** Founder, The Nail Artistry

28 **MALOBIKA BANERJEE,** Singer, Actor, Songwriter & Founder of Skycrew by Malobika MJ ›



30 **DR MARIAZEENA JOHNSON,** Educationist & Chancellor of Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology

32 **DR MEINAL CHAUDHRY,** Chief – Strategy, Branding, Digital and Corporate Communication & Director – Radiodiagnosis and Interventional Radiology, Aakash Healthcare Super Speciality Hospital, Dwarka

34 **MIRA KULKARNI,** Founder, Forest Essentials

36 **NAYARA LASKAR,** Founder & CEO, The Home Interior Stylist Studio

37 **PALLAVI SHUKLA,** Founder & Designer, Pallavi Vikram Fine Jewellery

38 **RADHIKA SEKSARIA,** Artist

39 **RASHMI DAGA,** Founder & CEO, FreshMenu

40 **SEEMA SINGH,** Social Entrepreneur

42 **SHAILADI GUPTA,** Founder & Director, Kindshell Global

44 **SHRITI PANDEY,** Founder, Strawcture

46 **SUCHITA OSWAL JAIN,** Vice-Chairman & Joint Managing Director, Vardhman

48 **DR SWATI PIRAMAL,** Vice-Chairperson, Piramal Group

50 **TRUPTI AGARWAL,** Educationist

52 **VANDANA LUTHRA,** Founder, VLCC

54 **VANSIKHA NAHATA,** CEO, The June Shop

55 **YASMINE SVENSSON,** Creative Director, Creative Heritage

56 **YUKTI NAGPAL,** Director, Gulshan Group

58 **ENTREPRENEURSHIP 101** Let *your* dreams take flight!

IN THIS ISSUE

02 FOREWORD
02 TOMBSTONE

GET *FEMINA* RIGHT AT HOME

- **To subscribe, SMS FESUB to 58888**
- **To subscribe online, visit mags.timesgroup.com/femina.html**

FEMINA TAKES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR UNSOLICITED PHOTOGRAPHS OR MATERIAL. ALL PHOTOGRAPHS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED, ARE USED FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY. VIEWS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THE ARTICLES ARE OF THE AUTHORS/SUBJECTS AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THOSE OF THE EDITORS OR PUBLISHERS. WHILE THE EDITORS DO THEIR UTMOST TO VERIFY INFORMATION PUBLISHED, THEY DO NOT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ITS ABSOLUTE ACCURACY. IN MATTERS WHICH MAY BE SUB JUDICE, *FEMINA* TAKES NO LEGAL STAND. *FEMINA* CANNOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR PRODUCTS, PRODUCT INFORMATION, PICTURES, ILLUSTRATIONS, ETC.

ANY INFORMATION RECEIVED BY US THROUGH RESPONSES BY USERS/SUBSCRIBERS TO THE SHORT MESSAGING SERVICES (SMS) KEY CODES OR SUCH OTHER SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE OF OURS WILL BE USED IN WHOLE OR PART, IN OUR PUBLICATIONS (OTHER THAN CONTACT INFORMATION), FOR OUR RESEARCH, INDIVIDUAL MARKETING, STRATEGIC CLIENT ANALYSIS AND FOR OTHER INTERNAL PURPOSES AND ALL COPYRIGHTS IN SUCH INFORMATION WILL VEST WITH US. YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION SHALL NOT BE SOLD, TRADED, RENTED OR IN ANY WAY DIVULGED TO ANY THIRD PARTY UNLESS WE ARE LEGALLY BOUND TO DO THE SAME.

BAKING UP **A STORM**

ADITI GARWARE

Cake Artist & Baker

With a Bachelor of Socio-Legal Sciences and an LLB degree, one would think the person would go on to become a lawyer, but that is not the case with 31-year-old Aditi Garware. She turned to baking as a profession and turned her passion for food into a career. She trained with many international chefs in her quest to perfect her art and founding Sweet Boutique by Aditi gave her creativity the outlet it needed. She has been creating showstopper sweet creations for the past six years and has been recognised as part of India's Top 10 Cake Artists by Cake Masters UK 2020, and as Pune's Number 1 by homebakers.co.in in 2019. An Indian Cake Awards Rising Star of the West finalist, and Cakeology Structural Cakes bronze medalist, Garware is also the brand ambassador for Ultimakes India and Magic Colours India.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

There are positives to this pandemic; I got a lot of time to research and to try out desserts which I otherwise wouldn't have been able to do due to my busy schedule. While my big cake and wedding cake orders got canned when lockdown started in 2020, I pulled myself together and made sure that I would be making my career's best creations to spread smiles and positivity. That's how smaller orders started coming in during the pandemic, and I kept going. I started with online bakery training for home bakers, homemakers and women who wanted to be self-sufficient. I took to social media and created content that would help others gain knowledge. My reels started trending and I received a lot of love.

My mother and my sister are my inspiration... My mom, Swati is a wonderful cook, and she has a lot of love and passion for food. My sister, Avanti is a chef

and my biggest inspiration. She has always inspired me to create out-of-the-box desserts and to follow my passion.

My vision is to take baking into every household of India and to inspire women to be self-sufficient physically, mentally and financially. Baking empowers me, and I'm sure baking will empower thousands of women across the country. It will give them a voice and their own identity. I hope to start a baking institute where I can train baking enthusiasts and help them achieve their dreams. I also want to start a dessert bar that would be home to fusion desserts.

If you wish to make baking your profession, put your heart and soul into it. There is no substitute for practice and hard work. Social media makes baking look very glamorous, but there is a lot of effort behind every creation. Experiment a lot, and practise. Take short courses and enhance your knowledge and skills. Miracles don't happen in a day, so you need to invest a good amount of time in pursuing this art and, then, it will surely give you back all the love you put in!

BUSTING MYTHS, ***BREAKING TABOOS***

ADITI GUPTA

Author & Co-Founder, Menstrupedia

From suffering through myths surrounding menstruation during 'that time of the month' to launching Menstrupedia, the most innovative company in the world when it comes to teaching about periods, Aditi Gupta has come a long way. This is her inspiring story.

The Period Diaries

Gupta was brought up in Garhwa, Jharkhand, a place where menstrual awareness was practically nonexistent. When she started menstruating at the age of 12, she was, naturally, baffled at the sight of blood and ran straight to her mother. Her mom made her bathe in two-and-a-half mugs of water because she believed it made the flow last for two-and-a-half days. Subsequently, Gupta was forbidden from touching or eating pickles, worshipping with the family, being part of any festivities or social events, and even sitting on another person's bed during that time of month. She used cloth rags to manage her flow back then, storing them in a dark, damp, and unhygienic place. Due to repeated washings, the rags would become coarse and uncomfortable to use over time. She was curious about the sanitary napkin advertisements on television, but the mere act of buying them was considered shameful.

On The Road To Awareness

Gupta wasn't alone in her troubles; this is the reality for millions of girls in our country who have to suffer in silence due to widespread menstrual myths. An outlook of this kind can be humiliating and damaging to the self-esteem of young girls in their formative years. Things started to change when, in 2009, she joined the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. Gupta met her now-husband, Tuhin Paul, there, and the problems she faced during her periods encouraged him to collate facts on menstruation. Interestingly, many of these facts were unknown to Gupta herself! The duo then undertook a project to understand the level of menstrual awareness among school-going girls in urban and semi-urban areas. From conversations with parents and students, they found that the subject of menstruation was just swept under the carpet.

Coupled with a lack of educational material, instead of questions being answered, menstruation myths were being passed down generations. These realisations sparked Gupta's Eureka moment. Along with Paul, she came up with the idea of a comic book to help impart knowledge around menstruation in an interesting way. The book would also diminish the shame around the natural body process.

Bringing About Change

Gupta and Paul brought three main characters — Pinky, Jia and Meera — to the comic book, through which readers learn what to expect during the first period, how to manage the menstruation cycle, and to understand facts around the same. Priya Didi, a doctor, guides the girls through the process. Although the comic prototype received a positive response, the project had to be shelved owing to lack of funds. Eventually, the duo graduated and picked up jobs. They shared the comic online, and started getting great feedback on it, with many offers to translate it into regional languages. After over two years, they quit their jobs to launch menstrupedia.com — an illustrated guide online, also featuring a Q&A forum, tips, and poems related to menstruation.

Once they had established themselves in the web space, Gupta and Paul started a crowdfunding campaign for the comic to be printed. Soon, they were ready with Menstrupedia comics! Today, the books are used across 6,000 schools, translated into 12 regional and four foreign languages, locally printed and distributed in five different countries, and shipped to 20 countries! They are currently working on expanding their team, reaching more girls through the comics, and creating sensible content to address issues such as the lack of sex education in India.

BUILDING **DREAMS**

ARCHANA KHOSLA BURMAN

Founder Partner, Vertices Partners

An expert in the fields of law and investment transactions, Archana Khosla Burman is determined to work towards the best interests of budding entrepreneurs who dream of having a start-up of their own. Archana is the founder of Vertices Partners, a leading law firm specialising in venture capital, private equity and acquisition transactions. She has been recognised as one of the Top Under 40 Alternative Investment Professionals in India by the Association of International Wealth Management of India (AIWMI) and the Indian Association of Alternative Investment Funds (IAAIF); featured in The Asia Legal Business (Thomson Reuters) 40 Under 40 List in the Asia Pacific Region; the Asia Legal Business (Thomson Reuters) Under 40 Indian Rising Stars 2021; and the 40 Under 40 Rising Stars by Legal Era. Under her leadership, the firm has made Forbes India's Legal Power List 2020 for both private equity and venture capital as well as for corporate commercial practices, and recognised for private equity by Legal 500 and Chambers and Partners 2021.

Archana is the National Head, FLO StartUp Cell - Programming and Collaborations for FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO), the ladies' wing of the apex industry organisation, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry. She has played a critical role in strengthening the community of women entrepreneurs and angel investors.

AT VERTICES PARTNERS, WE CARE DEEPLY ABOUT OUR TEAM AND OUR CLIENTS. SINCE OUR TEAM PUTS THEIR TRUST IN US, WE CONSTANTLY WORK ON FUNDAMENTAL INITIATIVES THAT, HOPEFULLY, CREATE A REAL DIFFERENCE IN THEIR LIVES.

Archana is also involved in one-on-one mentorship programs for several entrepreneurs. Additionally, she works closely with other chambers of commerce, accelerator funds and government organisations to help accelerate the start-up ecosystem in the country.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into business?

After more than a decade and a half of working with some of the largest law firms of the country, I embarked on this journey with my partners to create a workspace with the heart and honesty that many believe this industry lacks. At Vertices Partners, we care deeply about our team and our clients. Since our team puts their trust in us, we constantly work on fundamental initiatives that, hopefully, create a real difference in their lives.

Similarly, for our clients, partner-driven relationships, sector-agnostic initiatives, and a holistic approach to work help to deliver quality for the mid-level segment.

Who has been your mentor?

I am inspired by a woman driven by the two key I's - impact and independence, Vijayalakshmi Das, or Viji. If it were not for her self-confidence and absolute belief in herself, the role of the Indian microfinance sector, which lies at the very core of financial inclusion, might have remained yet unwritten.

What have been your biggest learnings?

"If you attempt to please everyone, you will end up pleasing no one" The challenge that I have faced as a leader at several junctures of my entrepreneurial journey is the difficult choice to be made between good opportunities, all having their pros and cons for my stakeholders. This choice forms a strategy and, as much as a buzzword 'strategy' is, the truth is, without this, most businesses flounder not knowing who they are or where they are going. Focus and prioritise, and, soon, you will be able to discern the true options from mere distractions.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

Whenever we talk about women entrepreneurs, we talk about the challenges that women inevitably face because of the society we live in. This is extremely unproductive. Instead, it is far more useful to maintain an unwavering focus only on what you can do rather than the externalities beyond your control. There are enough people who are more than ready to recognise your value if you do. They are just a little harder to reach, so cover all the bases well. This has helped me create a firm that has recently announced a one-day Period leave each month for all our women colleagues.

BRINGING LUXURY TO HOMES

AISHWARYA REDDY

Founder, Khenshu

A young entrepreneur in the world of design, Aishwarya Reddy is passionate about indigenous art forms that are on the verge of dying out. Her efforts to bring these back into the spotlight in a way in which ancient crafts meet modern sophistication are commendable and much lauded.

Fascinated by the detailed craftsmanship inherent in traditional Indian arts, Reddy was determined to create unique masterpieces by blending the country's rich cultural heritage embodied in the opulent furniture and accessories of Indian royalty with contemporary architecture to design houses that speak volumes about their inhabitants. The company also makes fusion furniture that involves traditional Indian furniture making and has forayed into luxury interiors. With an immense knowledge in industrial design and a Masters in international business, she joined the NR Group, spearheaded by her father, where she worked on pivotal projects. In 2019, she launched her own luxury lifestyle brand Khenshu in Bengaluru.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you perceive the gap in the market and create a niche for yourself?

The shift from traditional Indian handicrafts to mass-produced goods has led many artisans to change their profession. They used to practise their art on the palaces of the royals, which came to a halt due to the transition. Khenshu aims to provide such artisans with a platform to showcase their talent and design luxurious furniture and decor pieces for modern, contemporary spaces.

The void in the market for Indian-made products is huge and, since the industry mainly designs homes outside India, Khenshu aims to tap into the luxury segment by creating something homegrown, which can further promote the Make in India concept.

Who has been your greatest inspiration in your entrepreneurial journey?

My father, Dr Nagaraj Reddy, has been my greatest mentor. He has been an integral part of Khenshu since its inception. Being a seasoned entrepreneur himself, he is well versed in real estate and technology, and he has been able to ably guide us through all the challenges.

What have been your biggest learnings?

The constant need for change and the need to evolve with changing market dynamics have been my biggest learnings so far.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

It is never easy to start from scratch; patience and resilience are very important for growth. Create strong networks that will help you get more opportunities. Accept criticism and feedback with an open mind as customer satisfaction is the way forward.

DREAMER, DOER, **GO-GETTER**

FARHA SYED

Fashion Designer

It's now or never! That's what Farha Syed told herself before taking the plunge into the world of fashion. For someone who grew up stitching clothes for her dolls and drawing outfits for her future fashion designing career, putting her dreams on hold only meant the passion was magnified as the years went by. Once she started wondering what her life could have been if she'd taken her dream with more sincerity and seriousness, there was no stopping her. She started on a small scale, and, 20 years later in 2018, finally went big with her brand FS Closet by Farha Syed, establishing her first-ever store, an exclusive boutique in Indore. In just three years, her brand has become part of various fashion shows including the Bombay Times Fashion Week, Mr. & Ms. MP, national and international exhibitions, multi-designer stores both across India and abroad, and more. Syed will also be part of the Bollywood film industry with three huge banners in the near future! It just goes on to show that, if you take that first step, there's no stopping your dreams from taking flight.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into fashion designing and make a niche for yourself?

Well, I have had a very passionate love for fashion designing since childhood. I started my business in 2018 with the thought of doing something I love and cherish. As for carving a niche, I did many fashion shows, exhibitions and events that made my brand popular. Many people reached us through these events, which got us recognition and clients. Slowly, FS became a name of renown in the world of couture.

Who has been your inspiration and why?

My inspiration has been all those women who, even finding themselves in complicated circumstances, never gave up and went ahead and lived their dreams. They made me realise that it's never too late to do what you desire.

What have been your biggest learnings?

Keep on learning throughout your lifetime. Always be open to new things, whether you are 15 or 50. The moment you think you are perfect, your progress will cease. Also, never ever let go of your dreams; hang on to whatever you have dreamt of.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

To all the wonderful, independent ladies who are aspiring entrepreneurs, go ahead and do it because you are going to do it anyway! Take risks; you never know what could have been for you and your life if you never do it. Live your life for your dreams and for your own self. And, last but definitely not the least, never ever give up.

IG handle: @farhasyedofficial
website: www.fscloset.com.

BUILDING ON A VISION THROUGH INNOVATION

ANKITI BOSE

CEO, Zilingo

In 2015, at the age of just 23, investment analyst Ankiti Bose left her job with Sequoia Capital to start her own business, Zilingo. What started as an e-commerce company offering B2B services is today a technology platform powering the global supply chain with innovative trade solutions.

Seizing Opportunities

It was on a holiday in Bangkok, visiting the Chatuchak Weekend Market, that Bose noticed that many of the small- and medium-sized shops there had no online presence. The China–US trade war that started shortly after resulted in US retailers leaving China, allowing for several start-ups to take advantage of the situation. And that's exactly what Bose did too! Along with Dhruv Kapoor, her now husband, she started Zilingo as a commerce and technology platform for fashion retailers. Taking advantage of the growing Internet connectivity in Southeast Asia, Bose brought small merchants from Bangkok and Jakarta's street markets onto a global platform, supporting them with cataloguing, distribution, and financing services.

Bose realised that apart from improving access to the Internet, she would also have to work on other areas such as financing, upscaling, website design, competing with large players in a global market, etc, for these retailers. So, she decided to give them a push in the right direction. She first worked on strengthening the company's own distribution capabilities, and then on B2B opportunities across the supply chain.

The focus remained on offering service opportunities that could transform disoriented, inefficient, tech- and cash-strapped value chains into profit-making ventures. Zilingo started with basic services such as inventory management and sales tracking, and later advanced to others such as sourcing, procurement, and financing. The company continues to identify upcoming fashion trends – its original venture.

Creating A Niche

Bose founded Zilingo with the vision to put responsible and efficient business within everyone's reach. Over the years, the company has evolved into an end-to-end supply chain enabler that gives other brands, distributors, wholesalers, factories, and retailers access to trade, financing, and logistics, all on a single platform. The company is headquartered in Singapore with operations across Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong, Australia, India and the US, employing over 500 people and working with about 50,000 partners across supply chains.

Bose has won several awards and accolades for her entrepreneurial skills. In 2019, she featured on the list of most influential and inspiring young people under age 40, was named Most Innovative CEO of the Year – Singapore, and featured in the Singapore 100 Women in Tech List in 2020, among others. She is also one of the few Indian woman to head a unicorn business, which is a privately-held startup valued at over $1 billion.

Empowering Women

Bose has a strong inclination towards women's empowerment; realising that almost 40 per cent of women in Indonesia leave the workforce after getting married, she started a programme to train the local women to create clothing. She is actively involved in other programmes that support and mentor women entrepreneurs. Seeing that workers in fashion mostly tend to be female, and that about 60 per cent of the merchants working with her company have at least one female founder or partner, Bose feels that striving to do better each day will invariably help empower women. Zilingo also has women's circles, where women employees come together and discuss issues that are holding them back, and coaching sessions are organised to equip women with skills to navigate their careers.

COUTURE, THE LUXURY WAY

ASRA SYED

Fashion Designer

She was first a carefree teenager, then a self-driven woman, but Asra Syed had never imagined that she would become a designer of this stature one day. And yet, here she is, weaving perfection into fabric and giving every one of her clients an empyreal experience! While design and creativity have always been part of Asra's life, in the designer's own words, "It just sort of happened to me."

Intrigued by design and fashion, Asra became experimental with her outfits as she grew up. While pursuing a degree in fashion design, she had a strong conviction about her fashion choices, and became interested in textiles. Her penchant for expressing her innate style through fashion and her sheer tenacity evolved into a journey to create a luxurious fashion brand that specialised in exclusive couture for women and mesmerising bridal collections. Asra's ethereal ensembles feature the most intricate designs and embroidery, and they have been much appreciated by models and fashion enthusiasts since her early days in the world of fashion.

Asra founded ASRA in 2018, with a vision for the brand to be established as a prominent one globally by delivering otherworldly couture collections to customers using her design skills and expertise. ASRA's mission is to bring the brand global recognition through flagship stores, product lines and franchises.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into fashion design and make a niche for yourself?

As children, we all have that one toy we feel most possessive about; for me, it was my closet. At 14, I remember looking at the clothes on the rack and wishing I had one of my own creations in there. I made the decision to pursue fashion full time in my first year of college. I wanted to bridge the gap between couture and real people, to make fashion accessible to them. I have always been motivated to make people feel beautiful in an outfit as opposed to making a beautiful outfit that is out of their reach.

Who has been your inspiration and why?

The one person that I can always turn to, at any point in my life, is my grandmother. My family is fairly conservative, but she has given me the freedom to live life on my own terms. I've had to spend countless nights working late, and she has been there for me through it all. Her support and open mindset have propelled me forward. The kindness and hard work she put into her work set a model for me to mirror in my own.

What have been your biggest learnings?

The biggest lesson I've learned is to trust my instincts and to go after what I want without letting my focus be deterred. It's never too soon to start something, and, the sooner you start, the better it will be in the long run. I wish I had realised earlier that I wasn't too young or naïve to have my own label.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

It's all trial and error. You have to be consistent in trying to make a niche for yourself. It's okay to not be on top of your game every single day. What's more important is maintaining consistency in learning something new each day. Try different things to find what works for you and then keep up with it.

Where do you want ASRA to be in 10 years?

New York, Paris, Dubai – the goal is to be a globally-recognised brand. As it goes, it's the World of ASRA. We want people from all over the world to experience couture our way.

IN THE BUSINESS OF HELPING PEOPLE

BENU SEHGAL

CEO, Freeport Retail India

Benu Sehgal is truly a name to reckon with. With over 23 years of experience in senior positions with organisations such as Ambience, DLF Utilities, and International Recreation Parks, and having worked in areas such as retail space development and marketing, business strategy implementation, leasing, liaising, marketing, sales, and more, she has worked miracles in the retail environment. The woman who turned DLF Mall, Saket, around in her six months as Senior Vice President of DLF Utilities Limited and Mall Head of DLF Place, Saket, has been able to do it all with a combination of skill, knowledge, industry know-how, and a keen perception of demand. From completing her Masters in biotechnology to earning a post graduate diploma in HR and becoming a certified Competency and Performance Developer, running corporate businesses efficiently and effectively came as a by-product of what she loved most – understanding people, what they want, helping them, and problem solving! Presently, she is the CEO of Freeport Retail India.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into the retail business?

Need is the mother of all inventions. There is an inner hunger in each one of us. Those who identify it can address it; others spend their whole life in search of it. I won't say I 'got' into business; business was a by-product of the thing that I loved to do. Though I did my post-graduation in biotechnology with bio-chemistry as my major, I did not pursue it further. I realised that I am a people's person with inborn leadership. I simply loved to help people, solve their problems. This became evident when I – almost without realising it – became the president of my college!

How did you perceive the gap in the market and how did you make a niche for yourself?

It's easy for a people's person to understand what people want! I was managing malls, and my highest sales would come through end-of-season sales. So, the market told me people want to wear brands but pay less. It was time to create outlet malls, hence Freeport! As for creating a niche, when you start doing what your customers want, and enjoy it too, the market carves the niche for you.

Who has been your inspiration and why?

You cannot crown one person as your idol and grow. Inspiration is a nectar that has to be drawn from many flowers (people). At home, my maternal grandmother was my biggest inspiration. She was a great woman; she lost her husband in the Partition, did not buckle down given the situation, became the breadwinner of the family. I stopped watching and reading fiction at the age of 35; my free time was devoted to biographies of successful people, be it businessmen, actors, YouTubers, et al. Each one has taught me something. Even the beggars at the signals teach perseverance; not that I promote the practice, but the point is that you can see that quality in them. When you keep knocking on doors, at least one will open!

What have been your biggest learnings?

The number one learning here is to never stop learning. The day you say 'I know it all' is the day you arrive at the dead end of your business. Keep evolving if you need to survive (inspiration: Coronavirus). Next learning: Put your family first. The carpet of success often puts your loved ones beneath it. You do not realise that the energy for your progress is provided by the burning of family bonds, so take extra care. Lastly, never limit yourself – all your boundaries for yourself lie in your brain and nowhere outside. The biggest example is Stephen Hawking.

AT HOME, MY MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER WAS MY BIGGEST INSPIRATION. SHE WAS A GREAT WOMAN; SHE LOST HER HUSBAND IN THE PARTITION, DID NOT BUCKLE DOWN GIVEN THE SITUATION, BECAME THE BREADWINNER OF THE FAMILY.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

Put your ear to the ground to listen to the market. The market talks to you in many ways. If you ignore it, the business will ignore you. You need to keep evolving; stagnancy is death for any business. A successful business woman has to develop a time machine in her brain. She has to see what her customer will want next and serve them accordingly. Business is all about identifying the problem and resolving that problem for customers. The problem can be as trivial as how to kill time. If you provide the best and easiest way to solve the problem, you become the king!

DESIGNING DAZZLING **SUCCESS**

HEMLATA MUKESH SANGHVI

Joint MD & Chief Promoter of Vardhman Jewellers, Vardhman Co-op Credit Society and Owner of Vardhman Films

A Software engineer by profession and an entrepreneur by passion, Hemlata M Sanghvi aims to use her skills and knowledge to take her business to greater heights. She is the backbone of the Vardhman Group Mumbai, having transformed the traditional firm Vardhman Jewellers into an automated business hub with hi-tech systems and automation processes. Complicated billing and data systems are now at her fingertips, which has inspired her son Aniket, and nephews Shubham, Rishi and Ashish to take the empire to the next level. She also took charge of Vardhman Co-Op Credit Society in 2016 and transformed it into a leading gold loan company. Vardhman Group, along with its core jewellery business, valuation and finance business, has ventured into films, properties, automobiles, antiques, paintings and the media business. The group is perceived as one of India's most trusted business brand, providing quality products and good customer service with 100 per cent transparency. With trust and brand loyalty, they are in the process of listing their company in Indian Share Market.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into business?

My husband took over the company in 2006 after the demise of his father. It was a difficult decision for me to enter the business, but my husband supported my joining the jewellery business. We did a market study,

and found that most customers opted for quality goods at a fair price. We kept 100 per cent transparency and addressed the gaps in the market. After evaluating my passions and skill with computers, my husband decided to go for automation and a system-oriented business plan that was new in unorganised sectors such as jewellery. I have now been following my passion for fifteen years, and look forward to expanding my skills further.

What have been your biggest learnings?

Stay positive, believe in yourself, and keep seeking knowledge. We kept moving ahead to avoid stagnation, kept connecting with customers, and looked at the brighter side all the time. We were focused on developing our strengths, and we worked until the work was done. We were always positive but, at the same time, were strong believers in ourselves.

Who has been your mentor?

My husband has been my source of inspiration; he mentored me and helped me believe in myself. He is an experienced individual, he shared his knowledge and advice in order to help me pursue my dreams as he saw my talent and ability, and helped me nurture them.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

Do not be afraid to fail. You must move outside your comfort zone. Let go off negative people. Have big plans and be confident that you will succeed.

WEAVING **STYLE**

INDU SHRIVASTAVA

Co-Founder, INDU

Helping women to be sustainable and vocal for local, Indu Shrivastava and her brand, INDU, are working to uplift the use of hand-woven fabric in everyday life. Her aim is to fill every woman's closet with at least 50 per cent outfits made from hand-woven fabric, and, to convince them further, she ensures that her label caters to women who exemplify confidence and power, and helps them dress the same way too. Under her leadership, the heart of the brand is intelligent silhouettes.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

It started with the idea to help others.

My daughter Ojasvini used to complain to me about her outfits, the pieces she wore to her workplace or for family events. I realised that this was not just my daughter's problem, but something we all face in our daily lives. At that time, I was reading a book on Indian textiles and heritage. It was then I realised that the problem was not the dresses, but rather the fabric they were made with. People in ancient times used to wear pure and natural fabrics that were made from what was available in the area as per the climate. Keeping this in mind, I started making clothes for Ojasvini using natural fabrics, keeping the designs simple yet elegant.

The legendary Coco Chanel is my inspiration.

She had this passion to liberate women and she did that through her outfit designs. She liberated us all, made us see how women dressed from a different perspective, and made us understand what fashion actually means.

"NEVER WAIT FOR YOUR TIME... BECAUSE THIS VERY MOMENT IS THE BEST TIME TO START.

Always follow your passion.

Listen to your heart, because you will hear your god. The words of the American fashion designer, Halston, resound with me: "We're given one name... Just one. And that's all we have while we're on the Earth. And it's all we leave behind when we're gone."

Never wait for your time...

This is my advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs, because this very moment is the best time to begin.

THE MULTI-TASKER

KANIKA GUPTA SHORI

Founder & COO,
Square Yards

An entrepreneur, philanthropist and most importantly, a mother of two, Kanika Gupta Shori wears her many hats with aplomb. A Wharton Business School alumna, Shori is the founder and COO of Square Yards, India's largest real estate platform.

She is also the recipient of several accolades including being on the Times 40 under 40 and the Business World Disrupt 40 under 40 2020 lists, and has won Young Achiever and Woman Icon awards, to name a few. To unwind from her busy schedule, she loves to travel and spend time gardening. She also takes a keen interest in home décor and often ends up getting engrossed in DIY activities for her home.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into business? How did you perceive the gap in the market and create a niche for yourself?

Post my maternity break, my husband Tanuj and I were keen to invest in the Indian property market, only to realise that the sector was in dire need of a proper framework and an independent, unbiased advisor who could guide buyers through the search and recovery process. Therefore, we came up with Square Yards in 2014. I had a belief in myself and my ability to fight mental hurdles, I was open to learning and gaining new experiences, and I had a set of clear goals, all of which helped me become a successful woman entrepreneur.

Who has been your inspiration?

Indra Nooyi has had a great impact on my determination to deal with challenges at work. I aim to emulate her humility, charisma and perfect balance between personal and professional life on every step of my journey. Putting the hearts of people situated at different steps in the hierarchical ladder ahead of us has helped us tremendously to boost our customer service and growth in this fragmented industry. Indra stands for optimism, confidence, a can-do spirit and a must-do resolve, and I have striven to project the same.

What have been your biggest learnings?

One, that an idea is nothing until it is executed. There are important lessons to learn on this journey, and, the more you allow them to shape you, the better you fit into your organisational role. Two, that resisting change and adversity can stagnate you, and fill you with frustration and animosity towards the system. Keep creating plans and try to execute them one at a time. I believe perfection can wait, being good is enough.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

"If you want to learn to swim, jump into the water. On dry land, no frame of mind is ever going to help you." I truly live by these lines said by the legendary Bruce Lee. As a woman, navigating the choppy waters of entrepreneurship requires

I AIM TO EMULATE HER HUMILITY, CHARISMA AND PERFECT BALANCE BETWEEN PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE ON EVERY STEP OF MY JOURNEY.

agility and an accommodative mindset while backing your own instincts and insights. Women are born multi-taskers and hence I feel these qualities come naturally to them. It is just a matter of channelising your vision and energies in the right direction.

As a mompreneur, one needs to practice patience and prioritization while being ambitious and persevering. Be yourself and always be ready to change perceptions. Take a leap of faith because that's when miracles happen. Instead of being complacent, learn and adapt to market needs and shifts. Lastly, be firm in your approach without losing your femininity in the process because that is your identity.

IMPACTING ***LIVES***

KHUSHBOO JAIN

Co-Founder and COO, ImpactGuru.com

An entrepreneur on a mission to make healthcare in India affordable to all, Khushboo Jain swears by the 3 Fs - Fashion, Fitness and Food. An alumna of Sydenham College, Mumbai, Jain is the Co-Founder and COO of ImpactGuru.com, India's leading healthcare financing platform that uses online crowdfunding to raise money in the case of critical illnesses, accidents and transplants, and for COVID-19 patients. In addition, Jain also heads the marketing, communications and design teams, looking after the strategies, product users' experience and the venture's work with nonprofits. She was recently featured in the Fortune 40 under 40 list in India and is among the Top 15 winning women entrepreneurs in the fourth edition of NITI Aayog and United Nations Women Transforming India Awards in 2019.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you perceive the gap in the market and create a niche for yourself?

ImpactGuru's Co-Founder, Piyush Jain, and I were keen to create a business model that would add value and meaning to our community. After quitting our jobs, we brainstormed to create a venture that could become a leader in the medical crowdfunding market.

We provide dedicated fund-raising support via personal crowdfunding coaching, online technology tools and apps through which we have managed to raise over 1,500 crores from 2 million donors located across 165+ countries, which was provided to 15,000 patients. We aim to reach a million people in need of financial help for their medical expenses over the next decade.

What has been your greatest inspiration?

My parents are my source of inspiration. My father is hard-working, and my mother has led nonprofits and worked on some great humanitarian projects. Seeing them work with passion and grit inspires me to bring out the best in people.

What have been your biggest learnings?

To become a successful entrepreneur, you need persistence, grit and determination to help you face the challenges ahead. You must constantly learn at each stage of the journey and dare to take risks to achieve something extraordinary instead of living with regrets. Customer satisfaction is of utmost importance, since the future direction of the company ultimately comes from what customers want.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

Select a suitable mentor to guide you. Be firm in negotiations. Projecting confidence backed by reasons why your organisation is perfect for your client will enable you to get what you want. We need to welcome many more women leaders in order to have gender-balanced workspaces.

BLENDING CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY PERFECTLY

MILI SAVEKAR

Creative Head, Interiors by Mili

With an eye for detail and a flair for innovation, designer Mili Savekar specialises in designing distinctive spaces. A Raffles International graduate, Savekar has worked with prominent interior firms across Mumbai before setting up her own venture in 2016 from an office in Tardeo. With her team, she always strives to keep the spaces she designs aesthetically and practically wholesome while accommodating the clients' preferences - be they residential, leisure or commercial projects. Her portfolio includes a Pilates studio, an opticians' showroom, a pizzeria and several homes and villas.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into this business?

I have been passionate about design and the performing arts from a very young age. I always found myself doodling intricate patterns in the corner of a notebook or eyeing elegant interiors on my travels. Soon, I realised this was my true calling. The trips abroad made me realise the lack of variety in India as compared to international designs, so I decided to craft my way into people's homes with my experience and knowledge. My designs are unique in nature since they are imbibed with my signature style and the preferences and personalities of my client, which, in turn, results in a distinctive project and a beautiful space in accordance with the client's vision.

Who has been your inspiration?

It is hard to pick one! Currently, I like Kelly Wearstler's evocative style. In a world full of Pinterest images, it is so refreshing to see her designs. The way she combines materials, colours and forms to create a mix of styles and seamlessly blends different designs is simply beautiful.

What have been your biggest learnings?

Apart from designing, which forms a major part of my learning, executing these designs to perfection and people management are skills I have honed over the years; each project teaches me something new.

Your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs...

Keep working towards your vision; perseverance always pays off in the end. If you are in a creative field, try to make something of your own instead of going with the trends created by someone else. A fresh perspective will get you noticed in the long run.

FLYING **HIGH**

KHUSHNUM AVARI

Founder, Panache Academy

She realised the gap in the market for an academy that offered aviation industry aspirants professional guidance and quality training. Having been part of senior cabin crew herself, Khushnum Avari decided to tackle the problem head on and form an institution that would help those looking to work in the aviation field. She went on to found Panache Academy, a training institution with a systematic approach focusing on quality training along with placement assistance. She and her team at Panache have successfully made a name for themselves across Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Indore, where the centres are based.

Under Avari's leadership and guidance, Panache Academy won the national award for the Best Aviation Academy in India for four consecutive years from 2016 to 2019. It also bagged the Excellence in Indian Education Award for two consecutive years in 2017 and 2018. The academy has also received the Students' Choice Award for Leading Air Hostess Training Academy in Western India. Yet another feather in its cap is the International Education Award in 2018-2019 for the Best Aviation/Tourism/Hotel Management Academy of the Year.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

The right inspiration and mentor pave the way... My mother Zarine Basla has been the biggest source of inspiration to me. She was an educator and head of Maneckji

Cooper High School in Mumbai. I always look up to her, and she inspires me to be positive and fair, and to create an impact in the lives of youth. She is the motivating factor for me to strive for success each day. My husband, Percy Avari, has been my mentor and my support system for life. He has always welcomed and respected my decisions, and has stood by me through thick and thin. I have always looked up to him for guidance and encouragement.

Learning for life... Being a part of such a dynamic industry, I have learnt a lot throughout my life, and I am still learning. I feel my biggest learning is to always stand up for what you feel is right. There are times when voices around you try to suppress you, but you should always stand for the inner voice that comes from your core, as it can never be wrong. As a part of my professional experience, I have learned to be generous and kind. When you are a part of such a fast-paced industry, there are a lot of experiences that aren't necessarily positive; such instances have always inspired me to keep my calm while being kind.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN VOICES AROUND YOU TRY TO SUPPRESS YOU, BUT YOU SHOULD ALWAYS STAND FOR THE INNER VOICE THAT COMES FROM YOUR CORE, AS IT CAN NEVER BE WRONG.

Advice for aspiring entrepreneurs... Women these days are excelling in each and every sphere of life across industries. I would like all aspiring women entrepreneurs to believe in themselves. I would advise them to take initiative, cultivate leadership, and dedicate their utmost attention and energy towards their goals. We women are born leaders with the inherent quality to multitask; don't let the world dictate terms to you! You can manage your career, family and your health altogether if you are focused enough! It's just a matter of creating the right balance.

PIONEERING A **REVOLUTION**

DR LEENA S

Founder, The Nail Artistry

From being a new entrant in the beauty industry just a few years ago to being considered a pioneer of the nail art revolution in India, Dr Leena S has come a long way. Born and raised in Dubai, she is originally from South India, and was always attracted towards Indian culture and traditions. After finishing her schooling, she chose to return to India for her graduation, and fell in love with the country. After completing her graduation in dentistry, she made a radical decision to enter the vibrant beauty industry with an aim to do something unique – nail art!

After the first The Nail Artistry luxury salon in Kochi, Kerala, became a huge success in the first year itself, Leena S. knew she had taken the right decision in switching career paths and building on her unique business idea. She soon expanded brand operations to Chennai, Tamil Nadu, in the very next year, and received the same love from the brands' patrons. Leena S has built a widely-recognised brand that will soon transcend national borders and reach audiences in the UAE and USA too.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into the beauty business and make a niche for yourself?

Yes, this segment is very unique and niche, and that's the real beauty of it. The beauty industry has long ignored this segment and, being a woman

entrepreneur, I could see a huge untapped opportunity. Nails might be small, but they make a big impact. In business or in personal interactions, people just can't ignore how beautiful or dirty your nails are. If you wish to impress people in your meetings, you just have to take care of your nails and give them the same attention and care that you do for your face or hair. That's where my brand, The Nail Artistry, comes in!

Who has been your inspiration and why?

It has to be my husband! He's been my rock, my strength, someone who truly believes in me and wishes nothing but the best for me. His work ethic and integrity are what inspire me to do better every day. He has been there for me since day one, and helped me realise my dream. He has given me strength in my moments of weakness, clarity when I was in doubt, and, most importantly, he has taught me to believe in myself and reach for whatever I feel is worth working hard for.

What have been your biggest learnings?

I find that being an entrepreneur makes me feel content and liberated as a woman. I value achievements and being independent, and it is only as an entrepreneur that I seem to have control over where my life should be headed. This, I truly believe, is my biggest learning. I am happy to share that the woman who stares back at me in the mirror every morning has a lot of confidence, strength and determination that she has picked up on her way up the ladder of success, and that's my biggest reward!

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

I'd like all aspiring women entrepreneurs to know that we're much better equipped than men to be successful in business. You see, women are ambitious and focused. We're mindful and intuitive, we're flexible and resilient, we have gratitude and empathy. All these are prerequisites in the personality of a good business leader. As such, I sincerely believe that a woman has all the qualities to be successful in business. All that we might need to work upon is staying positive.

Follow The Nail Artistry on https://www.instagram.com/the.nailartistry/

DYNAMIC **DIVA**

MALOBIKA BANERJEE MJ

Singer, Actor, Songwriter & Founder of Skycrew by Malobika MJ

A Jane of many talents, she has aced them all! Malobika Bannerjee, also known as Malobika MJ, has made a name for herself as a singer, actor and songwriter, but not content to rest on her laurels, she is also an entrepreneur with a clothing label of her own, Skycrew by Malobika MJ. A strong believer in being vocal for local, the brand is all about unique, customised clothing made from traditional fabrics and styles. A dreamer and an achiever, Malobika MJ has worked hard to get to where she is today, and her success in whatever she does is proof of her perseverance and determination.

EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW...

Source of Inspiration...

My family is my inspiration, especially my mom because she always motivates me to believe in myself. She has taught me that if I am doing right and working hard, nobody can beat me; I can definitely reach whatever and wherever I want to reach.

Coping with stress...

During the lockdown, I started cooking and I have found it an excellent stress buster. Even if it's just something like cutting vegetables, it makes me feel good. Otherwise I love to dance when I'm stressed; dancing gives me a lot of relief.

I'M AN EARLY RISER AND I LOVE THE SUNRISE. EVERY MORNING OFFERS ME A NEW DAY. EVERY ALTERNATE MORNING, I WAKE UP AND DO YOGA AND SURYA NAMASKARS.

Following rituals...

I'm an early riser and I love the sunrise. Every morning offers me a new day. Every alternate morning, I wake up and do yoga and surya namaskars. It gives me strength and positivity for the whole day.

Defining success...

To me, success means happiness, whenever you do something you really enjoy. Open yourself up to new challenges that will help you grow as a person, physically, mentally, spiritually and, of course, professionally, and be positive always.

REDEFINING EDUCATION, BETTERING SOCIETY

DR MARIAZEENA JOHNSON

Educationist

A revolutionary educationist with a great vision for redefining the education system, Dr Mariazeena Johnson is the Chancellor of Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, one of the leading universities in South India. It is under her leadership that the institute has made remarkable strides in various fields. Daughter of politician-turned-philanthropist Col Dr Jeppiaar, Dr Mariazeena is a dynamic personality herself. When it came to embracing a holistic approach to education, she followed in her father's footsteps. She continues to work relentlessly towards providing quality education and bettering society with the wholehearted support of her husband Dr Marie Johnson.

Dr Mariazeena was conferred with a doctorate by the University of Madras for her research study, Recent Developments in Women Entrepreneurship, which focused on the varied challenges faced by women and their multifaceted roles and responsibilities when pursuing entrepreneurial ventures. Apart from being instrumental in developing Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology into an inclusive institution, she has also initiated the Anbu Foundation, under which numerous students benefit from a full scholarship every year. She also supports skill development courses for students in government schools under the 'My Saturday University'

initiative, a fun-filled educational programme. In recognition of her services, she was selected as one among the Top 12 Women Transforming India by Niti Aayog and the UN in India. She has also been honoured by the President of India for being one among 100 impactful women in the country working single-mindedly for the cause of education. Dr Johnson has also won several other awards and accolades for her exemplary contribution to education and societal development.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into the business of education?

I have never looked at providing education as a business; it is indeed an opportunity to empower society. My father, the Founder Chancellor of Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, Col Dr Jeppiaar, groomed me with this vision of transforming lives. We constantly explore hidden opportunities to understand and deal with gaps in the market. Also, I don't believe much in positions; people should add value to the position, not value the position itself. The right person in the right place always reaps the right results.

Who has been your inspiration and why?

Of course, my father has always been my inspirational icon and he is undoubtedly my mentor. I am equally fortunate in enjoying the unflinching support of my husband Dr Marie Johnson, a pathfinder in his own right. My general philosophy related to inspiration is this: 'Every morning should inspire us to do something good for others; every night, before we sleep, our work should inspire us to plan for a better tomorrow'.

What have been your biggest learnings?

There are too many to recall; every experience has empowered me with valuable learnings. Among these, I have imbibed leadership lessons from my father, an innovative problem-solving approach from my husband, undeterred hope from the underprivileged sections of society, and the power of prayers from friends and well-wishers.

WOMEN CAN BECOME WONDERFUL MENTORS TO MEN; THIS MENTORING STARTS WHEN WE ARE MOTHERS, THIS MENTORING CREATES IMPACT ON MANY WHEN WE TRANSFORM OURSELVES INTO ABLE ADMINISTRATORS.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

Women entrepreneurs are most successful across the globe. Passion-driven perseverance is the reason behind every success story. Please never allow setbacks to stop you from moving forward. In my view, women can become wonderful mentors to men; this mentoring starts when we are mothers, this mentoring creates impact on many when we transform ourselves into able administrators.

SCALING GREATER HEIGHTS

DR MEINAL CHAUDHRY

Chief - Strategy, Branding, Digital and Corporate Communication & Director - Radiodiagnosis and Interventional Radiology, Aakash Healthcare Super Speciality Hospital, Dwarka

Determined, honest, and passionate, Dr Meinal Chaudhry is a perfect example of how to achieve the near-impossible.

A successful young entrepreneur, Dr Chaudhry brings great enthusiasm to the role of the Chief of Strategy and Branding, Digital Marketing, and Corporate Communications. She is also the Director of the Department of Radiodiagnosis and Intervention Radiology at Aakash Healthcare Super Speciality Hospital, Dwarka. After earning a Masters' degree in Radiodiagnosis from the National Board, she pursued her Healthcare MBA from the Indian School of Business. Quality has always been the top priority for Dr Chaudhry, who is a green belt in Lean Six Sigma and has completed her POI in NABH accreditation, which are industry Quality standards. An avid reader, she has also written for many national and international publications, besides articles in newspapers and various magazines. A hands-on mother of two, she has proven her mettle in handling multiple tasks effortlessly, thus inspiring many women who are passionate about their careers.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you come to become an entrepreneur and how did you find your niche?

Getting into the healthcare business was an idea at the back

of my mind since my MBBS days. I would not hesitate to say that I was very clear about my choice of the industry from the beginning. However, getting into the industry and facing the challenges has made me more compassionate and empathetic. Healthcare in India faces a huge demand-and-supply gap, but, at the same time, we know that it is still a service that people are reluctant to access at the right time. I strive to spread awareness about the importance of health and the price one pays if it is ignored. I strongly believe that if you are transparent, honest, and abide by the ethics of your profession, your hard work and perseverance never go in vain. It is extremely important to be honest and transparent with your employees and help them succeed because they are the foundation of any organization. One has to be democratic within the organization.

I have always dwelt on three things to set up a world-class healthcare industry: quality, transparency, and ethics. I would never compromise on the quality of service even if it does not make business sense; quality has to be non-negotiable. Transparency is the best policy, and, if you are honest and open about what you do, you will be able to make a strong footprint in the market.

Who has been your inspiration or mentor?

There are many names, but one person who inspires and motivates me is Indra Nooyi. Her ability to simplify complicated issues is praiseworthy. Once, in an interview, she said, 'When somebody gives me a complex problem, I become a student, and I forget that I am a CEO'. This statement inspires me a lot. This also gives us the idea that one should be grounded if one wishes to touch the sky. There are multiple examples where Ms Nooyi has spoken of how working women globally face similar issues, as biological and professional clocks are often at loggerheads with each other, but then there is a fabulous support system that we women create for each other that helps us do more and achieve more.

What have been your biggest learnings?

I believe in the theory of teamwork in which a leader sets an example by leading from the front and being hands-on with the team. My team is my biggest strength and pride, and, when we are motivated and directed well, even the sky is not the limit for us. Besides this, the attitude to take criticism positively helps a person and organisation grow

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

Never hesitate to take bold decisions. Do not get disappointed if you fail in your initial steps towards achieving your goal. If you want to make your present better than the past, learn from your mistakes and proceed. Do not worry about what others will say. Action, determination, persistence, and the courage to face your fears, bring success. If you think that you cannot balance your personal and professional life to become a successful entrepreneur, you are mistaken as all of us are natural multi-taskers. Be confident and fearless, then go out and conquer the world!

REVIVING AYURVEDA, **THE LUXURY WAY**

MIRA KULKARNI

Founder, Forest Essentials

With simple beginnings in handmade soaps and candles, Mira Kulkarni started Forest Essentials in 2000 with an investment of just ₹2 lakhs. Cut to the present: the company has a global presence with 80 stores in India, supplies to 190 hotels, and exports products to 120 countries.

Getting Started

Kulkarni graduated in fine arts from Chennai's Stella Maris College. Organic plants and herbal culture had always been two of her many interests. With her home being in Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, which is the hub for Ayurveda, Kulkarni had long been aware of its benefits. Armed with her knowledge of Ayurveda and natural products, she sourced herbs, medicinal roots, and oils from the region. These ingredients were already being used in ashrams as per ancient Ayurvedic formulations, but the products, though effective, were not pleasant or easy to use. Realising the gap in the market, she set out to create luxury Ayurvedic products that were also user-friendly. Kulkarni took the help of *vaids* and modern biochemists to make handmade soaps and cold pressed oils using pure and natural ingredients such as essential oils and natural spring water. Following traditional practices in creating these products meant that the inherent properties of Ayurveda stayed intact, meaning the products would be effective. Importantly, Kulkarni also ensured the products were delightful to use.

What started as a hobby to introduce high-quality Indian skincare products soon expanded into an enterprise after Hyatt Regency, Delhi ordered her soaps for its rooms. It wasn't long before the brand found more patrons, and, in 2005-2006, Forest Essentials posted sales of ₹6 crores! That's not all, Forest Essentials is proud to be an Indian brand associated with a global beauty conglomerate such as Estée Lauder. In 2008, the New York-based company acquired a 20 per cent stake in the brand, which was further increased to 40 per cent in 2014.

TODAY, THE QUINTESSENTIAL INDIAN BEAUTY BRAND IS RECOGNISED AS A PIONEER IN THE LUXURY AYURVEDIC PRODUCTS SEGMENT, WHERE ANCIENT AYURVEDA SECRETS ARE MADE AVAILABLE TO CUSTOMERS WITH THE HELP OF IN-DEPTH RESEARCH.

A Cut Above The Rest

Cosmetics, skincare and perfume brand Forest Essentials is not just known for its range of luxury natural, organic and Ayurvedic offerings, but also for the fact that the products are not tested on animals. Today, the quintessential Indian beauty brand is recognised as a pioneer in the luxury Ayurvedic products segment, where ancient Ayurveda secrets are made available to customers with the help of in-depth research. Forest Essentials is also the only Indian brand that conceptualises, formulates, manufactures, bottles and sells products in its own company-owned stores.

Kulkarni's vision of turning traditional beauty recipes and therapies into luxury products, coupled with her tireless efforts, turned a fledgling startup into a brand name that is known across the globe. She has been conferred with several awards and accolades for her entrepreneurial spirit and endeavours, and featured in Fortune India's Most Powerful Women In Business list consecutively from 2011 to 2016.

A TOUCH OF LIFE

NAYARA LASKAR

Founder & CEO, The Home Interior Stylist Studio

“PEOPLE UNDERESTIMATE THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL IMPACT OF LIVING IN BEAUTIFUL SPACES.

An enthusiastic interior stylist, Nayara Laskar loves adding soul to empty spaces, giving them a life of their own. Born and brought up in Assam, Laskar is the founder and CEO of The Home Interior Stylist Studio. A Belgian national currently residing in Dubai, she studied at Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi, and pursued an MBA from Solvay Business School in Belgium. After securing a job in Deloitte, Brussels, and spending 11 years working for the Big Four, she went on to work for Flanders Investment & Trade in Dubai. The mother of two (son Avyan and Sparky, her Labrador), Nayara finally made a career switch and established her studio to live out her dreams and aspirations of styling and designing homes.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into business?

The pandemic changed my perspective toward life and made me realise that we need to love and live life to the fullest. People underestimate the physical and mental impact of living in beautiful spaces. It does contribute towards a healthy and happy mind. To infuse positivity and happiness into homes through my designs became my priority. Thus, ‘Homes with a soul’ has become my motto in life.

Where do you find your inspiration?

My parents have been my biggest inspiration. My mother, Parvee, gave me the gift of designing, while I’ve got my dare-to-dream attitude from my father, Bobby.

The places I travel to, the energy at flea markets, and the history of antiques animate my work. McGee, Wearstler, Bullard, Sophie Walsh and many others have inspired me in many ways. I am whimsical and believe inspiration can come from anywhere.

What have been your biggest learnings?

Love yourself before you love anyone else. Never take anything for granted, and keep your expectations in check. Always work hard with absolute sincerity, and the results will speak for themselves.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

It is tough being a woman entrepreneur. Success knows no shortcuts, so work hard to reach the top. Dare to dream freely and strive to live your dream while planning things with precision and implementing them with your heart. Be open to learning, and know that it is totally fine to fail. Trust your intuition, know your competition, but be your own greatest competition.

WITH A PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE

PALLAVI SHUKLA

Founder and Designer, Pallavi Vikram Fine Jewellery

Always gracefully elegant, Pallavi Shukla is the woman behind the magnificent pieces of jewellery at Pallavi Vikram Fine Jewellery. With her vast experience in jewellery design, Pallavi is the lead visualiser and designer of bespoke natural diamond, polki and jadau jewellery for the brand. With an eye for intricacy and a resolve to aim for brilliance, she brings immense diligence and dedication to all her work.

A homegrown jewellery brand started in 1995, Pallavi Vikram Fine Jewellery is very close to Pallavi's heart. Her husband Vikram, one of the founders, is a diamond trader, and she started the business as a hobby she was passionate about. The company that began with a small team has organically grown into a family business. Pallavi and Vikram, along with their son Karmin and daughter-in-law Jahnavi, spearhead the departments of design, diamond supply, sales and administration, and marketing, respectively. The studio is located in Vile Parle West in Mumbai.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you come to be an entrepreneur?

My husband Vikram is a diamond trader, and I thought it best to showcase my art and designing skills by integrating them into our trading business. When I entered the business, there were only a few designers in the market who made customised jewellery. We introduced multi-purpose, detachable jewellery that would offer convenience coupled with beauty, customising and delivering pieces as per the client's budget without compromising on quality.

Who has been your inspiration or mentor?

I never had a source of inspiration or a mentor to guide me, though having one would have been amazing. I am a self-taught woman who believed in her intuition and created designs by having a keen perception of the beauty around me.

What have been your biggest learnings?

Over the years I have learnt that patience and hard work go a long way in maintaining the robust structure of your enterprise. Also, being a good listener is important since your client knows what they want. My work is to execute their imagination in the best way possible.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

Give your 100 per cent at work, and it will speak for itself. It is time-consuming to reach the mark, but ensure that you never compromise on the quality of your work to achieve results faster. Always have a welcoming smile on your face; customers will want to come back to a place that gives them good memories.

ARTISTIC **ENDEAVOURS**

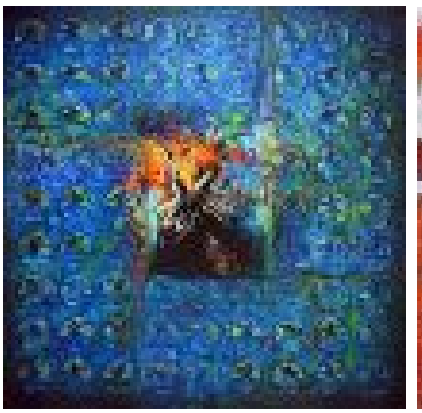
RADHIKA SEKSARIA

Artist

An accomplished artist with a career spanning over 20 years, Radhika Seksaria has created a distinct identity for herself in the art world. Born and raised in Gorakhpur, she realised her love for art as a child, going on to explore different colours, themes, forms and mediums. She now works with acrylics. Once she was introduced to Rumi's poetry, her art found its inspiration, and the rest, as they say, is history! Through her work, she portrays the search for peace and tranquillity in a chaotic world. With each of the strokes and shades she uses, a different story is woven, that enthralls the viewers.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

For the love of art... My love affair with the paintbrush began in childhood. In the initial years, I would explore different colours, themes, and forms. I'd try to comprehend the world around me through my art. When I got married and moved to Mumbai, I studied under a teacher from JJ School of Art and later participated in several group shows and competitions at the city's famous Jehangir Art Gallery. At my first solo show – titled 'Miraaya' – actor-singer Raageshwari said that my paintings had a spiritual quality and suggested I read Rumi's poetry. From then on, my journey with Rumi began. As I read his couplets, I felt the strong pull toward his ideology. The circular movements that depict ecstasy, celebration, union with the divine, and a sheer celebration of life itself were something I wished to convey in my work too.



In search of divinity; her latest art collection... My latest collection, titled 'Sifar', has been conceptualised by that eternal nothingness that resides within us all... That state of zero, which not only helps the Sufi but each one of us to realise the divinity within. The 'Sifar state' is needed in every artist and his creation, in every devotee and his devotion, in every lover and his loved one, in every meditator and his experience...

Inspiring the aspirants... My advice to young artists all around the world, first and foremost, is to be original; don't get jealous. Get inspired. Get motivated by the people you see around you. It doesn't matter if they're half your age or twice your age. As long as you are creating new work, you are growing. This leads me to my next point: create work as often as you can without stressing yourself out. You will learn and grow as long as you are creating as often as you can fit into your schedule and actually finishing pieces. Thirdly, try new things. If you usually work with a pencil, try the pen; if you like acrylic paint, try watercolours. Play around with styles, look at an art history website or textbook, and pick out someone different, like Van Gogh or Magritte, draw with a different style because you never know when you might just find something you like.

SERVING UP **A STORM**

RASHMI DAGA

Founder & CEO, FreshMenu

Armed with enviable exposure gained through working in different industries from IT and jewellery to education and more, Rashmi Daga's Marwari genes finally brought out her entrepreneurial skills in 2014, when she founded FreshMenu, an on-demand food business. The online restaurant, which was established at a time when there were hardly any players in the food delivery space, continues to hold its own today.

Journey To Entrepreneurship

Daga completed her Electrical Engineering from Delhi College of Engineering and then PGDM from IIM-Ahmedabad in 2003, following which she worked as a business manager with IBM until 2005. She went on to dabble in various industries – as Regional Sales Executive at Johnson & Johnson, VP – Operations at TutorVista Global, SVP – Sales at Bluestone.com, and head of the sales division at Olacabs, before setting up her own venture in Bengaluru.

With the aim to create a differentiated product that was delivery optimised, Daga established FreshMenu, a multiple satellite kitchen-based delivery service serving gourmet meals. Her business stood out from food aggregator services such as Zomato and Swiggy, as hers was an online restaurant delivering chef-cooked fresh meals to customers residing within a 5 kilometre radius of their satellite kitchens.

Apart from FreshMenu, Daga also embarked on creating an online curated art marketplace. Her unique platform afday.com was established in 2011, and generated about Rs. 5 to 10 lakh in monthly revenues. Daga, however, shut down the business after about a year and 9 months as she didn't see her venture scaling up.

Creating A Niche

Daga chose to dish out world cuisine, seeing that "that's where the most aspirational food sits," covering a range of flavours from Mexican and Lebanese to Japanese and everything in between! Her menu caters to the traditional as well as acquired modern Indian palates. That's not all; fresh and quality ingredients, a daily-changing menu, and a commitment to excellence keep patrons intrigued and coming back for more.

FreshMenu has also organised the 'Vocal For Local' campaign to promote the use of ingredients obtained from local farms in its dishes. The company has been following this approach since inception, partnering with local farms, ensuring quality and hygiene in the food it serves.

Success Story

Apart from Bengaluru, FreshMenu has expanded to Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai and Pune over the years. The company achieved breakeven in 2019, earning a total of Rs 141 crore. Today, FreshMenu operates from 40 kitchens, receiving about 20,000 orders every day, with 45 per cent of the orders coming in through the company's own food delivery app, and the rest through Zomato and Swiggy.

While the brand has a number of competitors, it reigns supreme with its dynamic menu, well-trained chefs, and innovative kitchens, operating both as a cloud kitchen and takeaway restaurant. For her entrepreneurial spirit, Daga has been conferred with awards and accolades such as the Fortune 40 Under 40 and Women Entrepreneur Award.

AN ENTREPRENEUR **FOR EMPOWERMENT**

SEEMA SINGH

Social Entrepreneur

Making her mark and inspiring others, Seema Singh fights the good fight to help those in need. A social entrepreneur from Mumbai, she has been working tirelessly to ensure that those affected by the ongoing pandemic get the help they require. Her aim is to spread positivity, and she does that seamlessly through her work. She has been felicitated as the Times Power Women and Times Interact's – Achievers recently.

Finding Her Calling...

While Singh had no prior experience in social work, she realised that that was her calling and started working towards bringing about a positive change in people's lives 15 years ago. Working her way up with passion and grit, she founded an NGO, MeghaShrey. She has striven hard to ensure that the work she and the NGO does benefit people in need, and this has ensured that the two are known as credible names in social work. Under her leadership, MeghaShrey has expanded over the years and became a national NGO, working towards the betterment of underprivileged children and poor people, and feeding the hungry in India. She has done this through her own hard work, without any dependence on her family's name and status. She doesn't rely on funds from any person or organisation and does all the work out of her own finances. She is also a homemaker, who ensures she balances all the parts of her life with much finesse.

When the pandemic hit last year, many people in Mumbai struggled to feed themselves and their families. They were facing a crisis, and Singh, through her NGO MeghaShrey came to their rescue. She worked diligently to provide food and other essentials to those in dire need. She has been distributing food to more than 200 needy people daily, and conducting food donation drives in the poorer sections of society and in the interior areas of Mumbai. Her 'never-say-die' attitude and her will to ensure help is given have made her work industriously to spread positivity and hope among the underprivileged.

Giving Wings To Women's Dreams...

Being a strong advocate of the Vocal for Local movement, Singh promotes small women entrepreneurs, local artisans and weavers in Mumbai to spread awareness about their work and to help them become self-sufficient. She has helped many women to set up small-scale businesses such as beauty parlours, fashion designing centres and more. She mentors young women on their startup journeys and helps create budding entrepreneurs. She counts herself privileged to be able to inspire and motivate other women to realise their true potential.

UNDER HER LEADERSHIP, MEGHASHREY HAS BECOME A NATIONAL NGO, WORKING TOWARDS THE BETTERMENT OF UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN AND POOR PEOPLE, AND FEEDING THE HUNGRY IN INDIA.

NURTURING KINDNESS

SHAILADI GUPTA

Founder & Director,
Kindshell Global

Born to doctor parents, Shailadi Gupta knew from the age of seven that she wanted to be in a nurturing profession. She went on to become a nurse and moved to Canada to learn more about international health care. The struggles she faced as a first-generation immigrant nurse led her to found Kindshell Global. As its founder and director, Gupta helps immigrant nurses by providing them with the resources and support they need to make their transition into the new nursing community smoother.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW:

I was born into a family of doctors. My uncle is a famous neurologist in Newark. My father is a paediatrician. My mother was a gynaecologist. I was born and raised in an atmosphere where medical professionals and patients were always around. So, since childhood, it was a dream to choose the medical profession.

I was driven to found Kindshell by a desire to help my fellow nurses. I came to Canada on a student visa in 2009 and managed to clear the Canadian License Examination for nursing and become a registered nurse while still a college student doing a nursing management course. But, around me, I saw many of my fellow nursing students from India and other countries such as Ghana

and the Philippines doing all types of odd jobs not even distantly related to nursing. I realised that they were not receiving proper guidance to become nursing professionals in Canada. Driven by a desire to help, I made up my mind to start a guidance-cum-consultancy and coaching institute for internationally qualified nurses. This would enable them to become eligible to work in Canada after clearing the license exams quickly, and not allow the nursing education they had received in their own countries to be wasted. Kindshell was founded in 2017. I cleared my National Council Licensure Examination (the Nclex exam) for the USA in 2008.

Kindshell is unique, especially when it comes to the teachers. They are thorough professionals, and our teaching methods are unique and knowledge-oriented rather than with the sole aim of passing the exams. The results are in the range of more than 99 per cent, more than any other competitive institutes, and also multi-dimensional as there are so many exams these days, including the OSCE and USA exams.

We will be launching Kindshell in India soon. We were planning to launch last year, but couldn't due to COVID-19. We are going to be different as we plan to make our institute a role model according to international standards but keeping the Indian values of compassion, service to humanity and service without discrimination as our core values.

MY CORE STRENGTH IS IN DESIGNING GLOBAL CAREERS FOR NURSES AND FOCUSING ON MULTIPLE LEVELS OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENT.

Through the pandemic, the workforce that we created with Kindshell was placed in many Canadian medical facilities. They made us proud by working sincerely and committedly through COVID times in Canada. We have received very good feedback from their employers, and we are extremely satisfied with and gratified by their performance in clinical settings.

COVID-19 proved to be a blessing in disguise. We went into digital mode quickly, and things moved smoothly with little interruption. Our clientele improved and so also their performance and satisfaction levels. Flexible hours and reduction in travel hours helped students concentrate more on their studies; they also saved some money while studying from home.

I have been featured in *The Rebel Nurse Handbook: Inspirational Stories* by Shift Disruptors. One gets motivated even more by appreciation in an international journal or book. I don't know if I deserved it, but my fellow nurses do deserve this recognition, and it works as an inspiration that we can all do it. I am grateful to all who nominated me for inclusion in that book. We are rebels to rebuild nursing as the noblest profession.

My plans for the future are to set up a nursing skills improvement academy, chronic disease management facilities, geriatric care, and hospice and palliative care centres in India. My core strength is in designing global careers for nurses and focusing on multiple levels of skill development and knowledge enhancement for nurses and nursing assistants.

I wish to ensure that India has the best nursing care available. My vision is to integrate innovation with education for nursing and to create more nurse leaders and managers from India... I want to revolutionise local and global healthcare through improvements in nursing education.

ON THE **GREEN PATH**

SHRITI PANDEY

Founder, Strawcture

Young entrepreneur Shriti Pandey is on a mission to protect the environment by converting waste into resources. Hailing from Uttar Pradesh, and with a Masters degree in construction management from New York University, the 28-year-old civil engineer dreams big dreams and executes them to perfection. Pandey came back to India after completing her studies and went on to launch Strawcture Eco in 2018. It focuses on using leftover straw from harvesting crops such as wheat, sugarcane and rice and from coconut and using it to build agrifibre panels for commercial and industrial use. This technique has proven to be cost-effective and eco-friendly, and has now been approved by the Indian government.

She also works towards the betterment of the climate and environment and has been named a climate fellow by the New York based non-profit Echoing Green, from whom she received $90,000 in seed funding as well. Recently, she constructed two COVID-care centres in Patna, Bihar, and Jalandhar, Punjab, using stubble; these run solely on solar power and no water was used in their construction. Pandey is also a TedX speaker, a 22nd Youth Assembly Social Impact Challenge Award winner, and an Acumen 2020 Fellow.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

I always thought I would do something in the field of academics. But life came with a set of risks and chances that brought me face to face with some problems I could not ignore. I set out to start a profit enterprise in 2018 since I strongly believe that money coupled with the right business model can create wonders for the world, make a greater impact and promote sustainability rather than philanthropy.

My biggest learning in the past three years has been that you must learn to get comfortable with uncertainties and discomfort as they are synonymous with growth. As an entrepreneur, you cannot get complacent; you should always be on your feet, hungry to learn, adapt and grow with whatever is thrown at you to deal with. Since business is a lot about firefighting, navigating and making hard decisions daily, it is as important to set aside some time to introspect, pause for a while and strategise as it is to dance on the floor and run the show.

Jacqualine Novegratz is someone I look up to as a mentor and an inspiration. She wanted to make bigger changes in the world, which started with her leaving a cushy job in investment banking in New York and living for almost a decade in Africa, working in micro-finance, which led to the inception, in 2001, of the Acumen fund, a first-of-its-kind impact fund. She believes that conscious capitalism can pave the way to address the bigger challenges our world faces. She also believes that the mindset of the world should change in terms of looking at low-income families as customers and not beneficiaries. I look up to her for inspiration to uplift the poorer communities and to lead with empathy, compassion and kindness.

MY BIGGEST LEARNING IN THE PAST THREE YEARS HAS BEEN THAT YOU MUST LEARN TO GET COMFORTABLE WITH UNCERTAINTIES AND DISCOMFORT AS THEY ARE SYNONYMOUS WITH GROWTH.

I would like women entrepreneurs to just call themselves entrepreneurs; it would help them believe that they are equally qualified to run and scale a company. It's very important and valuable to have a strong tribe of equally ambitious women around you, since there are times when you start doubting yourself or deal with imposter syndrome. Sharing space with like-minded women works well at these times. Lastly, trust your intuition but back it up with relevant facts. Always possess feminine energy in the room when being assertive, since the world needs a lot of compassionate, assertive and passionate entrepreneurs today.

TAKING THE **LEGACY FORWARD**

SUCHITA OSWAL JAIN

Vice-Chairman & Joint Managing Director, Vardhman Textiles

She didn't just join the family business, she took it to new heights. Meet Suchita Oswal Jain, the Vice Chairman and Joint Managing Director of Vardhman Textiles, who has been associated with the group for about 20 years. She started her career here as an Executive Director and gradually worked her way up. It was under her leadership that the brand, a leading player in yarns, established the first fabric manufacturing plant of the group. Her dynamic approach, goal-oriented outlook, long-term vision and strategies power Vardhman Group's pursuit of excellence. It is through her endeavours that Vardhman today is a trusted partner for a slew of international brands, catering to the most quality-conscious markets across 75 countries. Her work has been much appreciated, and she has received many national and international accolades celebrating her efforts.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

I have wanted to continue the legacy since childhood. When visiting the factories with my father, S P Oswal, Chairman and Managing Director of Vardhman Group and a Padma Bhushan awardee, I was smitten with the potential of the textile industry. I made my mind up to incorporate my ideas and creativity to contribute to this great institution.

My father is my mentor. I was brought up with values that taught me to overcome challenges and navigate past obstacles, to make a path for myself and others. My zeal, as well as the challenges, motivated me to join the business.

Potential has no gender. Your capability is what results in a promising career graph. Restraints and challenges are there only to be overcome. If you believe in yourself, in your goals, such limitations disappear. Do I believe that I have a different gender perspective? As a woman, I value variety a lot. Change is something we all crave when it comes to fashion and dressing. We want to look pleasant, glamorous at times, professional at others. So, a woman's perspective in the fashion and textile industry definitely stands out.

RESTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES ARE THERE ONLY TO BE OVERCOME. IF YOU BELIEVE IN YOURSELF, IN YOUR GOALS, SUCH LIMITATIONS.

To empower women, we aim at holistic development that includes skill development, competency building, soft skills, etc. To increase women's participation in the economy, our teams visit families of women in rural areas and counsel them to permit their daughters to come and work with us. We organise visits to the organisation for the parents and elders in the villages to help them feel secure about sending their girls to our facilities. We provide hygienic living conditions and an active lifestyle to these girls.

Success means inspiring others. I feel successful when I can inspire other women to aim high and work towards their goals. During the pandemic, being able to contribute and help people gave me a sense of contentment. While achievements provide the necessary momentum, the feeling of being able to give back, blended with the accomplishments is a success.

Change begins with you. Accepting the change and adapting quickly is crucial in business as also life but it is up to you whether you wish to be led by the change or lead it. Keep doing your thing. Listen to your heart, follow your passion, and you will do great.

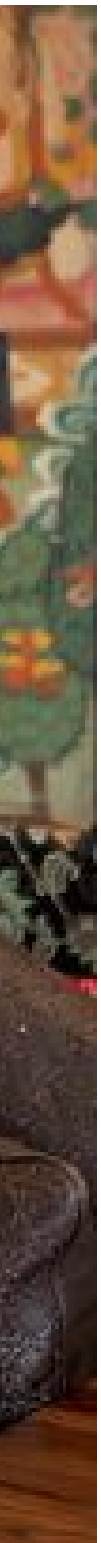
A WOMAN FOR THE WORLD

DR SWATI PIRAMAL

Vice-Chairperson,
Piramal Group

As one of India's leading scientists and industrialists whose contributions to innovations, new medicines and public health services have been too many to count, Dr Swati Piramal has carved a niche for herself. The Padma Shri awardee has championed the cause of female leadership not just by leading from the front herself, but inspiring and encouraging other women to do so too. As the director of the Piramal Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Piramal Group, she is very involved in creating innovative solutions and establishing avenues that promote primary healthcare in rural India through Health Management and Research Institute (HMRI) – a mobile health service, women's empowerment projects and the transformation of India's education system across public schools to unlock the potential of the young leaders of tomorrow through the Piramal Gandhi Fellowship Programme.

Dr Piramal also founded the Gopikrishna Piramal Memorial Hospital in Mumbai and launched several pan-India public health campaigns against chronic diseases, osteoporosis, malaria, TB, epilepsy and polio. The hospital also hosts the first-of-its-kind sports-medicine



centre. She serves on the boards of several healthcare and financial services, manufacturing and service companies as well as of Indian and international academic institutions such as IIT Bombay, Harvard School of Public Health and the Harvard Business School. She has served as the first woman president of India's Apex Chamber of Commerce (ASSOCHAM) in 90 years. Her strong influence in important public policies and governance related to health care is widely recognised and has led to major policy changes that have helped reduce the burden of disease.

Additionally, Dr Piramal has served on the Scientific Advisory Council and the Council of Trade of the Prime Minister of India.

EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW...

Even as a young doctor, I knew I wanted to help reduce the burden of disease. While still in medical college in 1982, I was moved by the plight of the children of mill workers who had migrated to the Parel area, the centre of Mumbai's mill district. It was an area where polio flourished, alongside many myths related to polio, including one in which an evil goddess was said to attack children. Mothers didn't want their children to take the vaccine either. So, I animated a bunch of medical students, and we conveyed ideas on how to prevent polio using songs and street plays. In time, I set up the Gopikrishna Piramal Memorial Hospital – an ambulatory care centre that treated 25,000 children a year and also made prostheses for children to be able to walk. Within a decade, the region became a no-polio zone; there was no longer a need for our prosthetics centre. We had proved that prevention is less expensive and better than a costly cure.

IT IS TIME TO GET OUR BUREAUCRATIC HEALTHCARE SYSTEM TO RESPOND TO THE CRISIS WITH BOTH SPEED AND SCIENCE. THIS WILL RESULT IN NEW DRUGS BEING AVAILABLE FOR TREATMENT, FASTER AND MORE SENSITIVE TESTING, AFFORDABLE CARE IN HOSPITALS, ETC.

The pandemic was a moment in history where the importance of public health was underlined. It created an unprecedented global health crisis accompanied by a leadership and financial crisis that is compounded by inequities in access to healthcare primarily because of gender, race or poverty. The low investment in public health and healthcare in general – at about 1 per cent of the GDP – has resulted in widespread infections with the COVID virus, resulting in mortality as well in those with comorbidities. It is a loss of both lives and livelihoods. It is time to get our bureaucratic healthcare system to respond to the crisis with both speed and science. This will result in new drugs being available for treatment, faster and more sensitive testing, affordable care in hospitals, etc. So many innovations and scientific collaborations are needed faster than the speed of sound!

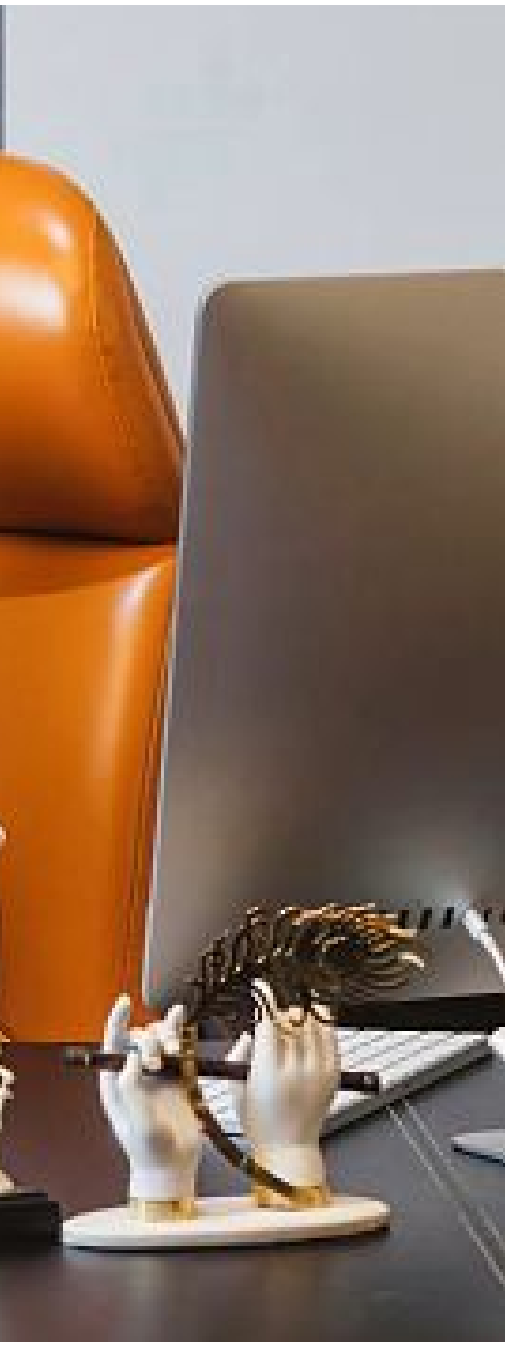
Knowledge helps overcome gender bias. I gathered the power of many hands joining together, even when I found myself the sole woman on many boards. These included big commercial organisations, public sector companies, government institutions and academia where I served on the board. For example, if I was to make a presentation to the Prime Minister or to the Reserve Bank of India, I painstakingly gathered relevant information from other women bankers or economists before I spoke. I would read at least a thousand pages on a subject before I spoke on nuclear energy or defence. This way I improved my reading and learning dramatically. If you know your facts, it isn't easy for anyone to dismiss you.

WITH A PASSION FOR EDUCATION

TRUPTI AGARWAL

Educationist

Mom to three young children, Trupti Agarwal takes care of her family business with as much ease as she runs her beautiful home! A gold medallist in home science from Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and a commerce graduate and postgraduate in business administration in human resources from North Maharashtra University, Agarwal serves as the Chairperson and Director of the Vishwakarma Group of Schools. The group comprises seven schools under the banners of Vishwakarma Vidyalaya, Wisdom World School and Vishwakarma International Schools, with a total strength of over 10,000 students being animated by 500 full-time teachers. Agarwal is also the Vice-President of Vishwakarma University and takes on the full responsibility of the entire infrastructural development of the Vishwakarma Group.



As if that were not enough, Agarwal has brought a new dimension to her family business, leading all her textile and apparel ventures with her head and heart. She has also taken on the mammoth task of being an active trustee of the famous Mahalakshmi Mandir at Saras Baug, Pune. It is no easy task to get 15,000 schoolchildren together during the Navratri festival to collectively chant the Shree Sukt Path, an initiative that has been entirely spearheaded by Agarwal.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you find yourself drawn into being an educationist and how did you make a niche for yourself?

I have been fortunate to have inherited the Vishwakarma Vidyalaya set-up from my family. Although the schools had been running for a good 15 years, there was feedback that the quality of education provided was not good enough. I worked on developing the team of teachers and gave them exposure to the best schools in the city. I also inspired them to dream of developing a higher quality of education even though our schools are targetted towards students from the low income group. Team development has been my main work and my forte. While starting Wisdom World School at Wakad, we did not compromise on hiring the best of teachers. I believe having the best people to work with is, in itself, a privilege and a motivation.

I UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND LEARNING FROM MY OWN MISTAKES. DREAMS AND PLANS ARE GOOD, BUT EXECUTION IS THE KEY.

Who has been your inspiration and why?

I am generally inspired by women who have devoted their resources and time to social causes. I have come across deeply passionate people who make a cause the central focus of their life and strive to bring a change in societal thought patterns. The inspiration for me started with my own mother who relentlessly helped and supported my father to build up a business empire while raising three children. I am inspired by all women, right from the ones doing domestic work to feed their families to women who use their resources and power for the needs of the society.

What have been your biggest learnings?

There is no individual play; all success is due to teamwork. For success, therefore, you need to have the best players to play alongside you. I have learned that there should be no compromise when it comes to selecting your key people and working with them. I understand the importance of continuous improvement and learning from my own mistakes. Dreams and plans are good, but execution is the key. The success of all my schools is due to the great team I have.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

I believe in working for your passion. For me, running my school and starting new schools is something that I believe I can do best. I don't feel like I'm going to work; it is something that I love doing and will continue to do for the rest of my life. I wish that all women entrepreneurs could also focus on their work without being burdened by the guilt of compromising on their home duties and other responsibilities. Keep in mind that the quality of time you give to your family matters more than the quantity of time!

A WOMAN WITH A VISION

VANDANA LUTHRA

Founder, VLCC

If there's one thing that sets entrepreneurs apart from others, it's the way they think! Case in point: Vandana Luthra, who, in 1989, decided to open VLCC, India's first world-class weight loss and beauty centre in South Delhi. From then to now, VLCC has grown into a chain of wellness centres operating from 326 locations in 153 cities across 13 countries in South Asia, South East Asia, East Africa, and the GCC Region. The brand employs over 4,000 people, including medical professionals, physiotherapists, nutrition counsellors, beauty professionals, and cosmetologists.

A Vision For Wellbeing

Luthra's mother was an Ayurvedic doctor who ran Amar Jyoti, a charitable initiative. This greatly motivated Luthra to impact people's lives in a positive way. After completing her graduation from the Polytechnic for Women, New Delhi, she flew to Europe to gain expertise in beauty, skincare, food and nutrition. Back in India, fuelled by creative energy and passion, she put the wealth of information she had amassed in Germany to work to establish VLCC. She focused on diet modification and exercise-based weight management programmes, and scientifically-derived intervention with world-class weight loss machines.

Foresight Matters

Luthra realised early on that the fast-growing and ever-evolving beauty industry needed trained professionals. It was her foresight that led to the birth of VLCC, a brand that is today the leader in the Indian beauty and wellness space by market share. Under Luthra's able guidance and leadership, VLCC has never lost sight of research. The brand manufactures and markets around 170 skincare, haircare and body care products, along with the functional and fortified foods used at VLCC Wellness Centres.

VLCC also runs vocational training institutes in India under the name VLCC Institute of Beauty & Nutrition. These institutes have grown to become the country's largest chain of vocational education academies in the segment of beauty and nutrition training. Apart from 73 campuses in 55 cities across India, VLCC has a training institute in Nepal too. The institutes have trained about 10,000 students annually, offering various courses in multiple disciplines.

Success With A Purpose

Today, Luthra lives her life between New Delhi, the UAE, London, and Singapore, not just running her business, but also spending time in philanthropic activities. She trains girls hit by monetary misfortune or suffering physical challenges for free, and serves as the Chairperson of the Beauty & Wellness Sector Skill Council (B&WSSC), a government initiative that provides skills training to those in need, under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana scheme. As if that were not commendable enough, Luthra, along with Kapil Dev, helms Khushii, one of India's most-acclaimed NGOs, and steers various CSR campaigns through it.

Awards And Recognitions

Luthra has received a number of awards for her entrepreneurial skills and achievements in the beauty industry. In 2013, she was awarded India's fourth highest civilian honour, the Padma Shri, for her significant contributions to trade and industry. She has also been conferred the Asian Business Leaders Forum Trailblazer Award in 2012, the Enterprise Asia Women Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2010, was ranked 26th in the Forbes Asia 2016 list of 50 Power Businesswomen in the APAC region, and has featured in the annual listing of '50 Most Powerful Women in Business in India' for five years consecutively, from 2011 to 2015.

A GIFT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

VANSIKHA NAHATA

CEO, The June Shop

Vansikha Nahata aced theory-to-practice when, after earning a degree from St Xavier's College, Kolkata, and a Masters in financial mathematics from King's College, London, she joined The June Shop (TJS) and became thoroughly involved in its management. A strong believer in creating great customer experiences, her vision for the company is to make TJS the go-to website for all gifting and lifestyle-related products. She enjoys analysing financial trends and number-crunching, as also a good read in her leisure time: The Intelligent Investor is one of her favourite books. She strongly believes that the more mindful moments you have each day, the better decisions you will make in life.

EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW...

Starting strong...

After returning home with my Master's degree, it was an instant decision to join the start-up (TJS), and direct all my attention towards researching and filling an untapped gap in the online gifting category. We wanted to create a one-stop solution for all gifting requirements, from millennial lifestyle products to elegant home décor items.

Finding inspiration...

The two people who have greatly inspired me are my brothers, Rishav Nahata and Pranav Jain. They have been a guiding light on every step of the process. It is with their guidance and mentorship that I have been able to adapt and mould myself into the businesswoman that I am becoming.

Learning the ropes...

Among the many things I have learnt after having stepped into business, the two greatest learnings that have helped me in my personal and professional life are saying 'no' to the good (small opportunities) in order to say 'yes' to the great (big ones), and only committing to things within my ability to deliver.

Advice to new entrepreneurs...

Live mindfully; make a deliberate decision to live each moment more purposefully, and bravely. Take a break from your daily default mode, in order to make better decisions at work and in life in general. Always make decisions keeping in mind long-term objectives, instead of giving in to short-term impulses.

DESIGNING **DREAMS**

YASMINE SVENSSON

Creative Director,
Creative Heritage

Now Creative Director with the award-winning Creative Heritage interior design studio, Yasmine Svensson is a former investment banker-turned-interior designer. She has made a name for herself as a designer with a wide repertoire of projects to match her years of international exposure to some of the best interiors globally. Based out of Colombo, the Creative Heritage studio's focus is on both residential and commercial commissions, and Svensson has many high-profile clients and projects to her name. Her focus on bespoke concept-led, detail-driven interiors means each design is unique, but always stamped with her signature attention to detail.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW:

Shifting careers...

In 2016, I made the decision to leave my investment banking career in London and move back to my home country to follow my passion and use skills I had acquired over the 10 years prior by setting up my own interior design studio.

Understanding the need of the hour...

When I was renovating my family home in Sri Lanka, I became weary of the limited scope of interiors available. The strong focus on tropical interiors, although beautiful, felt limited, and there was clearly a need for a broader offering. With more modern styles of architecture, there was a demand for a wider range of interior design, and Creative Heritage has been able to tap into this gap.

Finding a niche...

Our focus on detail-driven interiors, combined with our high level of international exposure, allows us to stand out as an interior design studio. We create bespoke concept-driven interiors, where the focus on detail runs through the whole process.

Developing one's own style...

There are several interior designers that I admire for their style and business skills, and I am always open to taking advice from those with more experience. But one thing I have found important is to listen to my inner voice. I find that, if one is quiet and honest, a lot of inspiration and answers come from within.

Learnings for life...

Good organisation, strong motivation and passion for work make for great teams, so choose wisely. Always focus on solutions rather than problems and, most importantly, on having integrity, treating all those we work with respect. Ultimately, it's about being a decent human being.

Words of wisdom...

Prepare yourself for a lot of responsibility, thinking on your feet and a lot of learning, but, if you are setting up and building what is your passion, there is nothing more rewarding than running your own business. The very best of luck!

LEADING FROM **THE FRONT**

YUKTI NAGPAL

Director, Gulshan Group

A dynamic young leader, Yukti Nagpal is carrying forward the baton for the Gulshan Group with great zeal and vision. A go-getter by nature with professionalism ingrained in her personality, Yukti is ready to take Gulshan to newer heights of success and recognition by leading the sales, marketing, human resources and construction functions, as well as working on the best customer relationship strategies as the company's director.

She has an MS in marketing from San Francisco in the USA, and has bagged the prestigious MARCOM Gold Award. Entrusted with bringing the brand to the next level and establishing new real estate trends, under Yukti Nagpal's leadership, the group has forayed into uber luxury housing. It is currently developing its project Gulshan Dynasty, which is a perfect amalgamation of luxury and wellness.

Yukti's vision - she believes in the idea that you don't just buy the house, but rather the neighbourhood - has resulted in Home Konnect, an arrangement of group activities for all age groups, conducted on a regular basis, inspiring people to interact socially and get to know each other better, turning neighbours into friends. The initiative enables residents to embrace and exercise a positive approach towards imprinting eco-friendly footsteps as a collective community.

Gulshan Dynasty, Sector 144, Noida

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW...

How did you get into business?

I have grown up in an environment where I have seen the enthusiasm of the people in the construction sector and have observed my family work relentlessly to make our business more than just brick and mortar, with attention to detail at every step and with a complete focus on customer centricity. I realised that, for a business or a sector to thrive, it requires a 360-degree approach and thinking from the customer's perspective. I returned from the USA to our brand Gulshan, a leading real-estate company that has been in business for the last three decades. My father's goal was to supply consumers with more than just houses; he wanted to equip them with a lifestyle. It was difficult at first since most people thought of real estate as a business that solely dealt with brick and mortar. I chose to work with these challenges because I sensed the enormous opportunity in our endeavours.

Who has been your mentor?

My father, the founder of Gulshan Group, has been my guide on my professional journey. He has always stood by me and backed me up in my efforts. Working on a project at Gulshan was very different from working otherwise in the real estate sector because the focus is on lifestyle. It demands thorough planning and forward-thinking ideas, and my father has always listened to my suggestions.

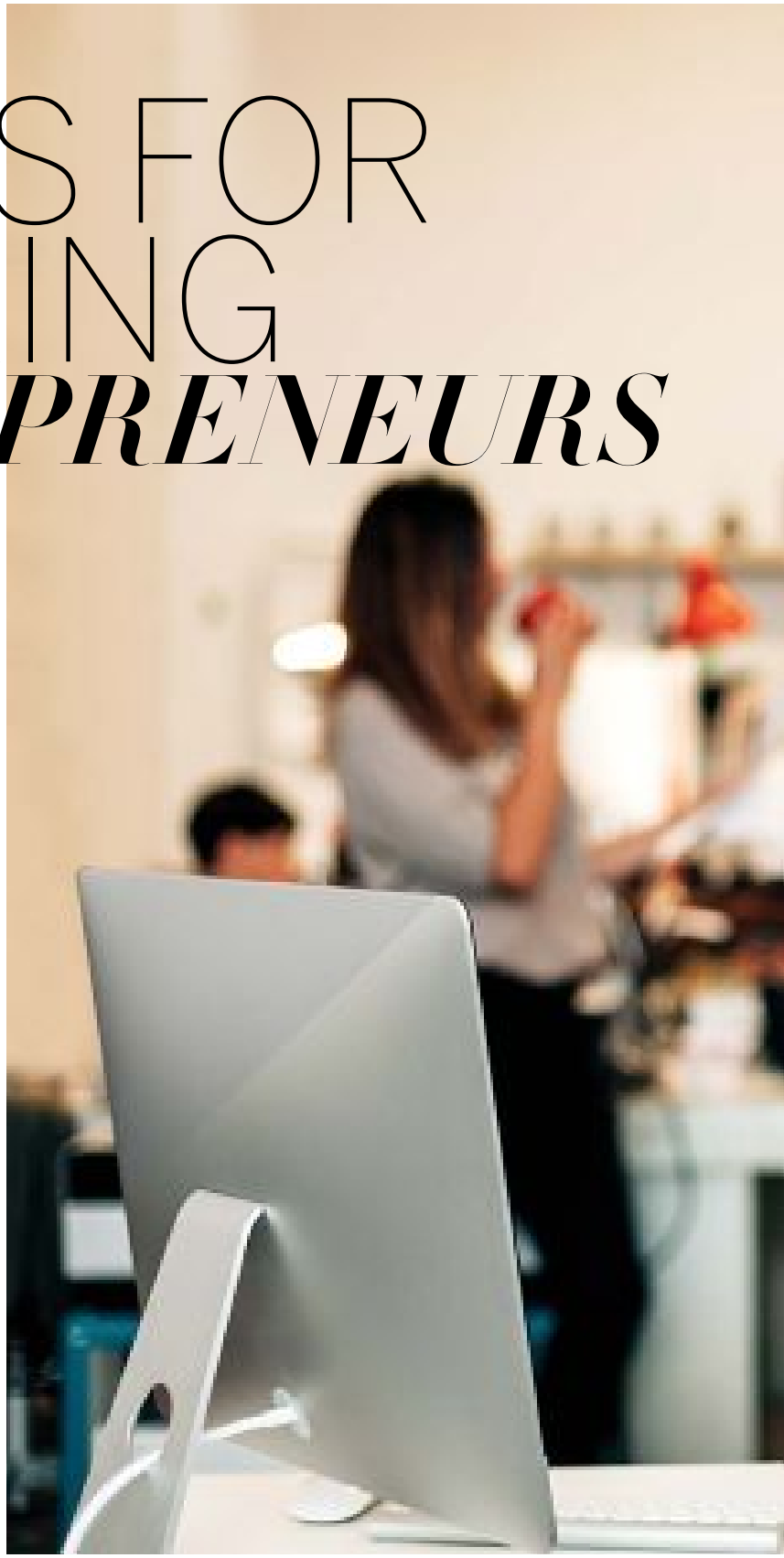
What have been your biggest learnings?

Change is difficult to accept, but, if you are persistent and can back your claims up with facts, people will support you. Many people in the sector avoid niche products for fear of financial disruption, as every project requires a significant investment; but my experience has shown that there are buyers for every product if you know how to sell it properly. In my experience with Gulshan Dynasty, I have learnt that acceptance is almost guaranteed if you meet people's expectations and demonstrate a project's impact on their lifestyle. Obviously, the promise of this lifestyle must be backed up by your stellar track record, which we are able to provide very easily.

What is your advice to aspiring women entrepreneurs?

Real estate is an industry in which you get to engage with people from all walks of life; it will make you happy when you see your customer happy in their new home. Challenges exist, just as they do in other customer-centric professions, and one must be prepared to deal with the daily demands that come with working with consumers. Soar high and don't let anything hold you back; take the leap to make a better tomorrow.

NOTES FOR ASPIRING *ENTREPRENEURS*



TURNING A PASSION INTO A PROFESSION OR SEIZING AN OPPORTUNITY – THESE GAMECHANGERS IN THE WORLD OF BUSINESS KNEW EXACTLY WHAT TO DO AT THE RIGHT TIME. IF YOU'RE INSPIRED TO FOLLOW IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS BUT ARE STUCK OR LOST, THIS GUIDE TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP WILL SHOW YOU THE WAY

BY KALWYNA RATHOD

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as an eye-opener of sorts. In the business world, we saw many businesses turn to dust, yet several rose from the ashes in unimaginable ways. There has been no dearth of talent, creativity or ingenuity, which has led to countless ideas, tailored to the times we live in, taking root and flourishing.

How easy or hard is it really to start a business from scratch, to ensure it keeps running and makes you the profits you dream of? "The true entrepreneur is a doer, not a dreamer," writes American businessman Nolan Bushnell. It's time to get down to making that dream a reality. ›

Get the basics right and power through

ENTREPRENEURSHIP 101 FOR CURRENT TIMES

Serial entrepreneur Milan Ganatra, Co-founder and CEO, 1 Silver Bullet, a company that helps build consumer experiences, developer-friendly infrastructure, and intelligent tools, shares tips and tricks with **RADHIKA SATHE-PATWARDHAN**

Understand, Evaluate, Upskill

It is important for any entrepreneur to understand the market they are entering, evaluate the pros and cons as also the competition, and upskill as required. "The pros of starting a new venture amid the pandemic were two-fold: it gave the first-time entrepreneur the opportunity to upskill, and the seasoned ones the opportunity to build for heightened scalability," Ganatra notes. He further adds, "It gave people time to study the competition, research the landscape, take an online course to better equip themselves for their business, and to evaluate the viability of the idea or concept."

Go Digital

"What really shone during the pandemic was the enhanced acceptance of digital business operations. The pandemic helped accelerate the adoption of digitally-capable businesses and highlighted the efficiencies digital models or practices could bring to the table," Ganatra points out. This is the right time to venture into the world of entrepreneurship with so many easily-accessible services. All you need is a certain amount to invest in the business and the will to work hard.

Put The Right Team Together

Any business, unless a one-man-show, needs people with the right capabilities and knowledge working together. Relocating talent might not have been feasible for a start-up otherwise, but, in these times of remote working, "talent acquisition is no longer restricted to your home city or state and, in some cases, even country," Ganatra says. "Entrepreneurs have the opportunity to hire the best minds to get their ideas off the ground or to pump up their productivity without having to bother about location restrictions."

Work On A Hybrid Model

Any type of work cannot be only offline in this time and age. "You have to make sure that your digital presence is as, if not more, prolific as your offline counterpart. Having an online channel or presence is pivotal to the future scalability and adaptability of your business model," Ganatra adds.

THIS IS THE RIGHT TIME TO VENTURE **INTO THE WORLD OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITH SO MANY** EASILY-ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

A ROADMAP TO SUCCESS

Rajal C, Founder and CEO at Gravitas, and Leadership Coach and Strategist who also served on the jury for CIIE.CO, a start-up incubator established by IIM Ahmedabad, puts together these questions budding entrepreneurs can ask themselves to find the right path

Who are the founding team members, advisors, and board members? Clarity makes all the difference.
What is the customer problem? What is the need or customer pain?
What is the solution? How can you make the customer's life better? Demonstrate the value proposition.
Why now? What is the market opportunity? Do you have market intelligence? What are the market trends? This makes your solution effective.
What or who is your competition?
What is your pricing strategy – per hour, product fees, retainer, utility, licence or subscription model?
Differentiation: How are you different? What is your model for creating/delivering value? What are your unique capabilities?
Are you a product or service business? For product, consider architecture, features, intellectual property; for service, decide the type.
Business model: How will you make money? What are revenue streams and resources?
Growth plan: Jot down your business purpose, core values, vision and mission statement. Is digital strategy a part of your business strategy?
What does your potential customer list look like? Who are your target customers, key channels, and partners?
Financials: What are the variable costs, direct costs, net profits, projections and milestones for the next few months or years, planning funds utilisation for organic or inorganic growth, or VC funding?
Sales and marketing: What's the sales and go-to-market strategy? What is your brand summary? Define sales chart, sales funnel
Leading the business: Defining leadership principles, leadership development plan
Tactical action steps – short and long term
What are your key metrics and how will you track them? This is important to measure the effectiveness of your business.

GET THE BASICS RIGHT

Can your hobby be a viable business option? What happens when demand for your product declines? What are your goals? These and many other questions can be easily answered as you begin and progress in your entrepreneurial journey, if you get the basics right. Entrepreneur and change maker Chiranjiv Patel, who harbours a passion for mentoring and shaping up start-ups, believes that finding the right business for yourself simply needs introspection. "It's all about knowing what you love, what customers love, the need for the business service or product, how your acquaintances react to the concept or the idea, how risky or easy it is to start the business you are focusing on, and last but not the least, the scope and plan of action," he says.

Patel shares some pointers to help you set the wheels of your venture in motion.

Stay Relevant

- Be consistent and keep yourself updated with current trends. Know who your audience is and what it expects from your brand; start appealing to a small group and then target more people to grow the circle or community
- Content is and will always be king; make subtle shifts in content in keeping with industry trends.
- Involve your audience in exciting campaigns.

Common Mistakes To Avoid

- Weak market research, not ›

understanding want or demand
- Not investing right
- Not having an understanding of the product first
- Underestimating the product
- Not having a business plan or deadlines for it to go steady
- Taking marketing and feedback for granted
- Absence of paperwork or agreements before associating with an individual or organisation

Indispensable Factors For A Viable Business

- Analytical thinking and calculated risks
- Detailed record-keeping of finances, team roles and tasks, and targets achieved
- Providing good services to retain loyalty
- Staying organised and focused on daily tasks
- Picking tasks that bring you business and not troubles

In My Experience...

"There are various types of business strategies that people follow, build and tailor-make depending on their needs. But I feel that the strategy that covers cost, quality service and focuses on target audience, whether mass or niche, is the best strategy for any business plan to survive at any time. The strategy should skilfully implement whatever is promised. It is good to multi-task only when you ace the art of perfection in one. Most importantly, treat your customer like god – respect their decision to put brand loyalty aside and give your business a chance." – Chiranjiv Patel

IT'S ALL IN YOUR HEAD!

Once you've got a solid foundation to stand on, it's time to take the first step. But how ready are you for it? Believe it or not, your mindset has a significant impact on your life – while it ignites your ambition and enables you to flourish, it also hinders your ability to grow, blinds you to opportunities, and keeps you chained to the familiar. Developing an entrepreneurial mindset encompasses a set of beliefs and thought processes that drives entrepreneurial behaviour, helping you be the leader you're poised to be and take key decisions correctly.

Speaking about the mentality one should possess to be an entrepreneur, clinical hypnotherapist, NLP Practitioner and Behavioural Investigator Pooja Saran says, "The very first thing to remember is that entrepreneurship is not just about attaining a rockstar status, which I am sure a lot of people have got an understanding of during this pandemic. I think of entrepreneurship as being similar to sports. I could be very good at badminton, right? I could play every day, I could work on my left hand, and I would be substantially better in a year and a half. But I just don't have the motivation to play in championships. The motivation or spirit or mindset comes from self-awareness and knowing your own strengths and enjoying them. Entrepreneurship is loving your game more than what the game gives you."

Saran further talks about how we all dream of success, but that there's no true success without failure. With each failure comes an opportunity for learning, but it's important to prepare for failures so that you can respond ›

"THE MOTIVATION OR SPIRIT OR MINDSET **COMES FROM SELF-AWARENESS AND** KNOWING YOUR OWN STRENGTHS"

"WITH EACH FAILURE COMES OPPORTUNITY **FOR LEARNING, BUT IT'S IMPORTANT TO PREPARE FOR FAILURES** SO YOU CAN RESPOND WELL TO THEM"

Taking Mentorship Lessons Ahead: Theory To Practice

"Today, I believe that taking mentorship lessons ahead involves two steps – first, choosing one thing, avenue or habit you want to work on and then trying it hands-on, the way your mentor guides you to, and, second, adding your own uniqueness to it once you have practised it enough. In the old days, we had the *gurukul* culture where we got to stay with our gurus, mentors, or teachers and see them in action for years. Now, we simply jump from one technique or guru to another if things don't work. The trick is to give any practice faith, time and patience for it to make a difference." – Pooja Saran

well to them. Saran says, "In business, you don't just have one weakness – imagine that, one day, all of a sudden, 50 weaknesses are exposed all at the same time. Imagine a game where you keep falling and breaking and keep collecting your pieces to recreate yourself or else you lose. Yes! You will lose a lot of times, the game will keep changing, but what keeps you moving is the clarity of thought and the outcomes you had planned when you started in the first place. The more clear you are on those parameters, the more courage you have to stand up every time you fall, because you know why you're doing it. This thought process applies not only to your business, but also to your career, friends, spouse, kids, spiritual exercise and every thing you practise."

MONEY MATTERS

As you start your entrepreneurial journey, there are a million things you need to think about, plan around with and strategise with. Among these is one of the most important aspects of this journey – finance. While entrepreneurship is the buzzword these days, it is difficult for entrepreneurs to balance their personal savings and investments with the demands of their venture. **RADHIKA SATHE-PATWARDHAN** collates financial tips that can make your entrepreneurial journey a little easier.

"BEFORE INVESTING, ONE MUST **CONSIDER THEIR INVESTMENT HORIZON, RISK APPETITE** AND FINANCIAL GOALS"

Balancing Personal And Professional Finances

"Separating personal and business finances is crucial for an entrepreneur. By setting well-defined financial goals for each, entrepreneurs can establish the right balance between the two while achieving their goals," says Zohra Hajiani, managing partner, Validus Wealth. She adds that entrepreneurs should diversify their investments to protect their financial future, as only investing in their own business exposes them to significant risk if the business is in a downturn.

Investment Options

"Before investing, one must consider their investment horizon, risk appetite and financial goals," says Hajiani. Those who wish to invest in the equity markets with limited capital can do so via a Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) in an equity mutual fund scheme by investing as little as ₹100 per month, she suggests. She also lists tax-saving investments like Equity Linked Savings Scheme, Unit Linked Investment Plans, Tax-saving Fixed Deposits and Public Provident Funds (PPF).

Managing Finances

"Set aside sufficient cash outflow, based on commitments and personal needs, for before you break even," notes Hajiani. If one is considering taking a loan, she advises considering customer-focused ones with benefits like lower interest rates and repayment flexibility. Haziani advises entrepreneurs to be "aware of where every rupee is coming from and going, which will enable you to set and achieve financial goals smartly." F

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK; USED FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

THE ECONOMIC TIMES
PRESENTS
LEADING WOMEN
IN BUSINESS
BROUGHT TO YOU BY
Edge
POWERED BY
FEMINA